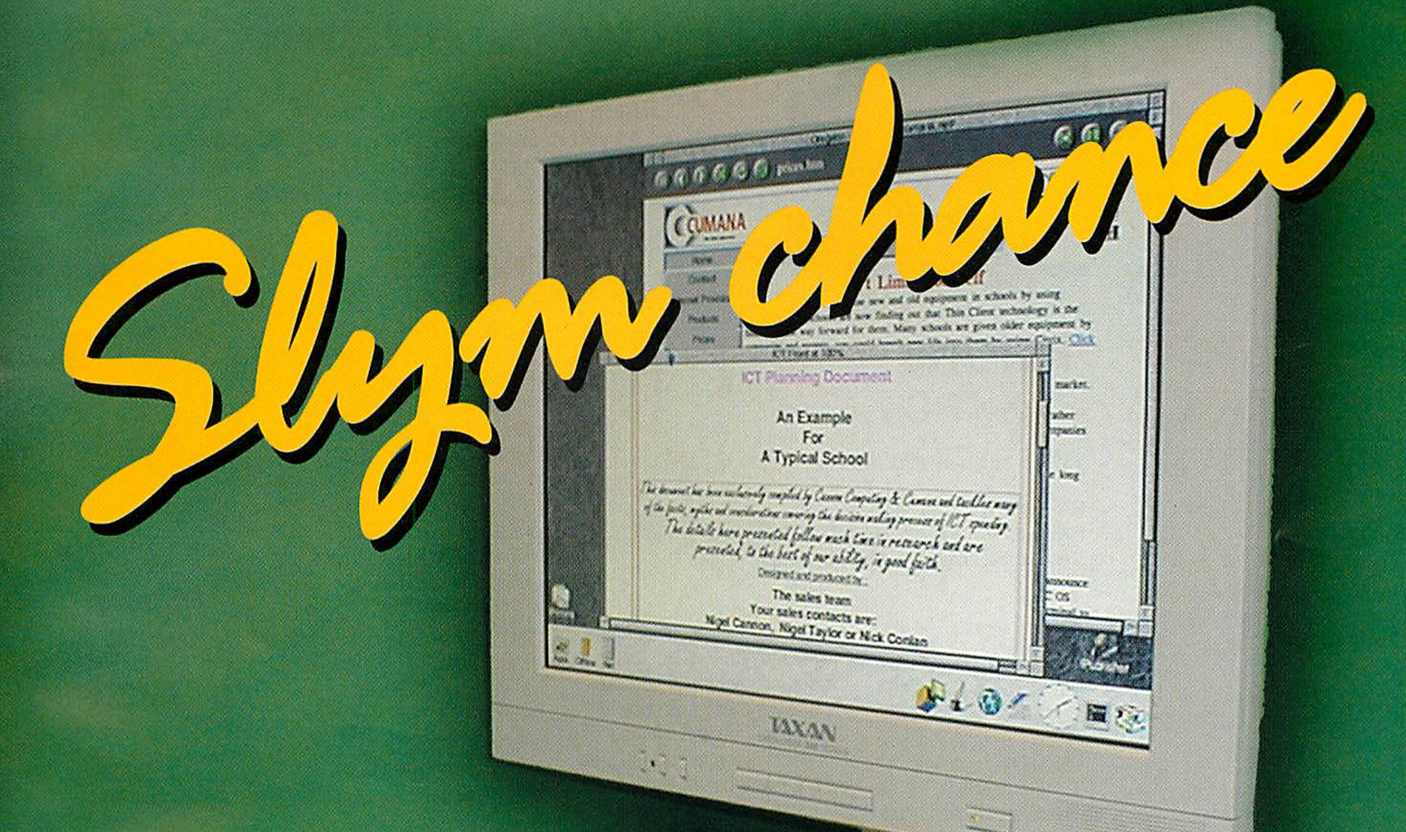
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ISSUE 236 AUGUST 2001 £4.20



August 2001

ACORN USER



Features

Regulars

September issue on sale 9th August 2001



It takes a lot to wipe out a group – even an unimportant one – a fact that is apparently unknown to many people.

The RISC OS market is a case in point. I have absolutely no doubt that those in power at the old Acorn believed that their exit would bring about an almost instantaneous collapse and disappearance of everything.

But here we still are heading towards another anniversary of that fateful day. Of course if they had cared to examine another example within their own area they might have got a better idea – old *Electron User* survived for 6 years after Acorn ceased to produce the computer. Groups are almost unkillable.

And we do have a group, we have common goals for the most part, the major businesses generally don't compete with each other, rather they complement.

One thing we have had a lot of in our market is hope and trust. We have been living on hope, with the occasional boost for several years – in fact from well before Acorn left.

However one sure way of killing a group is to destroy its communication lines – a group's is held together by communication. We have several sets of these lines – there's the Internet and the magazines as well as the User Groups.

And a group is really as strong as its purpose – Microsoft as an organisation had the "Windows on every desk" concept, they worked hard for it and pretty much achieved it.

So what is our purpose? The destruction of PCs? Some people think that's what we want to achieve, but it isn't. I think RISC OS and ARM-based computers as the most-used computer system would be a better goal.

But what do you think?

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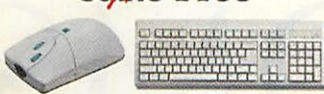
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Programmable ROMS

As part of the speculation about RISC OS 4.5 and the new RISC OS Select Scheme there has been discussion lamenting the demise of programmable ROMS; a problem that appeared to be a problem when RISC OS 4.0 first appeared. Gareth Simpson of Simtec Electronics has clarified the position:

"There has never been a time when programmable ROMS could not have been purchased.

"We've never had much difficulty in sourcing ROMS and it would appear that Castle have no problems either. (I have omitted Microdigital and Millipede from this list as they don't use DIP ROMS on their products, using SM devices instead.) The argument seems to be about 42 pin DIP (dual inline pin) ROM devices.

"It basically comes down to supplier relationships, the degree of effort given to find them and the willingness to pay a little more if a faster delivery is needed. We've been sourcing our own ROMS for almost 18 months since RISCOS Ltd said they could no longer supply RiscStation with any more pre-programmed devices.

"This caused a short term supply problem, but with some effort, we found a suitable alternative. We've been using natty little Flash ROM devices in the RiscStation motherboards ever since.

As the Flash ROMS worked perfectly in Risc PCs and A7000s, we also offered the alternative parts to RISC OS Ltd if they needed any help.

"Even during the 'famine' of last year, the longest lead time we were quoted was 12 weeks. For the past few months, the product has been ex-stock at the various factories. We chose to use Flash devices in our products as this gives us the flexibility to re-program a customer's ROMS easily. OTP EPROMS would have been cheaper and even easier to source.

"So as there is no problem with ROM supply, why are people saying that RISCOS Ltd have no ROMS? As with ourselves, I doubt that RISCOS Ltd would put themselves in a position where they could not ship product for lack of ROMS.

"Moving on to supply of 'Select' upgrades on CD. For partial upgrades and replacement modules this is fine, but the delivery of a complete RAM loadable replacement ROM image would cause problems. I hope that the RISC OS 'Select' Scheme is offered in such a way that users with machines capable of in-circuit FLASH upgrade can re-write their ROMS.

"I, for one, would find the *load ROM image and reboot* sequence most irritating. In that case, an extended ModPatch would be better way of delivery where upgrade modules are loaded in a similar way to the current replacement Window Manager and Toolbox modules.

"For users who can't re-program their ROMS, or for those whose application can't stand or support an image load and reboot, I hope that a replacement ROM scheme can be made available (now that we've cleared up the mistaken impression that programmable ROM's aren't available!)."

Completely unselectable

Last month we highlighted the press release from RISCOS Ltd about the new 'Select' scheme whereby small developers (as well as you and me) could obtain the latest upgrades to the operating system on a subscription basis. We had hoped that more information would be available by this month but we're still not clear about how the new scheme is going to cope with the range of RISC OS 4 versions in use.

It seems clear to us that it would be all too easy for a patch for a standard RISC OS 4.02 to cause havoc on an Omega or RiscStation 4.03 — or even with a standard Kinetic Risc PC. Of course RISCOS Ltd will have considered this but we would be happier if they confided with us and the dealers — the people who will be required to pick up the pieces if anything goes wrong. We did note that RISCOS Ltd stated they would not be dealing with problems by phone.

If the hardware developers and dealers are discussing the potential problem with RISCOS Ltd perhaps they would let us know so that we could be confident to recommend the Select scheme to our readers.



It's showtime!

Wakefield has come and gone for another year and RISC OS developers are working hard to prepare for the next big UK show on 20th and 21st October — this time in the south of the country. RISC OS 2001 has a different venue this year and one that may be more accessible for those of us from the north as well.

This is the third show, Epsom being the venue for the last two years. This year the show will be at the Blue Mountain Golf and Conference Centre at Binfield near Reading. The venue offers excellent road and rail links, and a shuttle bus service will operate from Reading Station. All the conference facilities at the Centre have been booked to give the greatest possible exhibition space. A separate theatre will allow the usual popular presentations.

Potential exhibitors should note that the move to Bracknell allows stand prices to be reduced below those of RISC OS 2000. As an added incentive, even lower stand prices are available for those who book early. Already, several key players in the market have reserved large stands. Almost half the stand space was allocated five months before the show date so exhibitors still out in the cold need to get in touch with the organisers very soon.

The show is organised by group drawn from the ARM Club, RISC OS User Group of London (ROUGOL) and Surrey and Sussex Acorn User Group (SASAUG).

Exhibition details have been supplied to most RISC OS companies. Anyone requiring an exhibitor pack, or additional information, should contact **ralph@armclub.org.uk**

Midwinter upgrade

Composition (written by Rob Davison in those long New Zealand winter nights) has been recently upgraded (again) and those of you with versions 1.18 or 2.0 can make use of a range of new features:

- Redraw handling improved for large selections of objects
- Added scrolling 'marquee' for selecting and deselecting groups of objects
- Made Shift-clicking on the math type bump arrows in the opacity dialogue the same as adjust dragging the slider (updates selection as you go).
- Subtle redesign of all toolbar icons for 32k colour. Note this has an impact on memory usage. If there is demand I'll do 256 colour versions which would reduce the base memory footprint by ~120KB.
- New toolbar buttons for texture mask effect and info dialogue.
- The Texture mask dialogue is opened statically and updated as the selection of objects changes. Drag file to this dialogue to load it into the texture mask of all selected objects.
- New texture mask options include 11 different ways of applying the texture mask (potential for up to 16 — more to follow).
- 3D texture mask types enable the angle dial. As usual, Adjust dragging sliders/dials updates selection on the fly.
- Select/Adjust to move through the available texture types with shift to apply as you go. Or, select from the pop-up menu — again, shift selecting confirms the selection and updates the images as you go.
- The tint button now opens a tint dialogue instead of tint colourpicker.
- Similar layout/behaviour to texture mask dialogue with 10 different tint types (including subtractive and blended tints), the ability to load a file to the selections tint mask(s) and global opacity slider (along with the obvious tint colour). Tint masks may now also optionally be tiled instead of one shot.
- Main menu items and key shortcuts for these effects are still to do and update as appropriate.

The upgrade is available from: **http://compo.iconbar.com/** If your version of *Compo* is earlier than 1.18 you'll need to purchase v1.20 from Clares Micro Supplies **www.claresmicro.com**

RISC OS for the price of a Beeb

APDL is aware that there are many enthusiasts who are still using early models. They know that such people would love to experience the benefits of a modern machine, fast drives, a CD RISC OS M, RISC OS 4 and lots more but often can't spend large amounts of money to buy such new computers.

One answer?

An exclusive Special Edition MicroDigital Mico computer for just £399 including VAT. That's right, just £399.00 including VAT, turning the price clock back to the days of the BBC B.

But this computer is no BBC B. The APDL special edition Mico desktop computer is powered by an ARM 7500FE processor with floating point co-processor, 8MB RAM, 4.3GB harddisc with the IDEFS and data transfer rates up to 9MB per second, 48x CD RISC OS M drive, RISC OS 4.03, sound card, external speakers, PS2 keyboard, mouse, user manual and twelve months return to base guarantee.

In addition there is the APDL Special Edition CD containing Ovation (version 1), Masterfile III database, DrawWorks, Fonts and Clip Art plus various other useful utilities and games.

This offer is available only while stocks last. Price includes VAT, but please add £13.50 UK carriage. Because of the low price of this offer a 2% surcharge will apply to credit card orders (not Switch or Debit cards). For more details and the full specification see the APDL web site at **www.apdl.co.uk** or contact APDL at 39 Knighton Park Road, Sydenham, London SE26 5RN. Tel: 020 8778 2659

Stop press

Following a late-breaking announcement it has been revealed by Aaron Timbrell that he is closing the retail end of his software production business, iSV, after seven years.

Forced reluctantly into the decision Aaron stated that his reason for closing this side of the business is purely a matter of logistics – just not en ough hours in the day.

Taking effect immediately all iSV software will be sold by APDL and support will be provided by that company.

Acorn hymn collection

A major resource for *HolyBible* users has been four years in the making. Its main features include:

- About 2300 full hymn texts (approx 50% PD and 50% copyrighted texts)
- Source and author information for a total of 5000 hymn texts
- Thousands of hymns and songs tagged to relevant Bible texts
- Tune and metre information is given where relevant
- Automatic addition of CCL Licence No. to copyright texts which you export
- Report generation ready for CCL returns
- A-Z index of hymns
- Many tunes hot-linked to the companion Hymn-Tunes resource which has 167 midi files.

As with all *HolyBible* Resources there are full search facilities, so you can search by words, phrases, author, tune, hymn-book, and so on.

Users must hold a current CCL Licence No. and have *HolyBible* 1.91 or higher — the Licence No. is required when you install the resource.

The cost of the Resource (including Hymn-Tunes) is £30 (inc. p&p) payable to 'Christian Acorn User Group' Please send to: Rev'd Colin Randall, The Vicarage, Warwick Bridge, Carlisle CA4 8RF Tel: 01228 560332 E-mail: **carandall@freeuk.com**

When ordering please state whether you have HolyBible's Resource Builder as two separate Registers will be kept as it is anticipated that those with ResBuild will want to customise the Resource by adding hymn-texts themselves.

In brief

Kanji for Ov Pro

I'm not sure how many Japanese-writing users of *Ovation Pro* exist; but should you wish to produce Kanji characters then Graham Jones has produced a Kanji applet for *Ovation Pro* and, together with the Kanji Fonts this is available through: **www.4ozNuff.org.uk**

PCBoard stupid

Now is the time for anyone with a use for an application that draws PCB layouts to download Layout and complain. I'd best explain that you should complain nicely.

Robert Richards (Acorn User's very own PC convert) has taken over development of the program from its original author, Bernhard Walter and intends to implement missing features. So this is your chance to ensure that the new version of the program does precisely what you need.

Layout can be downloaded from **www.richards44.freeserve.co.uk** Click on the "Software" button.

The present version is 1.10, the last version the Bernhard released. Documentation is included within the release. All queries, suggestions and bug reports should be sent to Robert at: **robert79@richards44.freeserve.co.uk**

Bearly believable

Paul Beverley has moved and the new address for Archive Publications is, believe it or not: Archive Publications, Nutwood, Middle Road, Great Plumstead, Norwich NR13 5EG Tel: 01603 722544

First steps free

The first edition of the book by Martyn Fox was originally published under the title "First Steps in Programming Acorn RISC OS Computers" in 1993 by Sigma Press Ltd. It has now been out of print for several years.

A second edition has now been released as a freeware DTP document, both in its

Continued...

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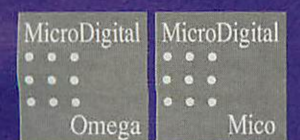
Acorn

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R7500 Lite (with their 19" monitor)	£891.00

The Lite+ model is the same as the Lite, but has an 8.4Gb HD and 64Mb RAM fitted as standard.
R7500 Lite+ To Lite prices, please add £94.00

The Scorcher model is the same as the Lite, but has a 10Gb HD and 64Mb RAM fitted as standard, plus at least a 4x4x24 CD ReWriter, CD Burn and a blank disc.

R7500 Scorcher To Lite prices, please add £315.00
R7500 Scorcher Twindeck (as Scorcher, with additional 48x CD drive) To Lite prices, add £349.00

The Networx model is a Lite without the HD or CD fitted. Monitors are available as with the Lite.
R7500 Networx (no monitor) £480.00

The Networx HD model is the same as the Networx, but has a (minimum of) 2Gb HD fitted as standard.
R7500 Networx HD To Networx prices, add £59.00

Portable £Call







We supply a range of CCD and laser bar code scanners which include our !BarReader driver software to allow bar codes to be read into and control most desktop software.

Further information is available.
Complete systems from £137.63

Our bar coding software produces Draw files of the following formats: EAN 8, EAN 13, UPC A, ISBN, ISSN, Code 39 (Normal & Full ASCII), Postcode, Telepen (Normal & Numeric) and Binary.

Further information is available.
!BarCoder – £69.32



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Other upgrades are available.

A3000 1-4 Mb	£64.60
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A3020/A4000 2-4 Mb	£49.00
A5000 2-4 Mb	£55.00
A300, 400, 5000 4-8 Mb	£128.00
Risc PC/A7000/RiscStation/Mico SIMMs:	
16Mb FPM	£28.20
32Mb EDO (HC, works in Risc PCs)	£52.65
64Mb EDO (works in Risc PCs)	£60.95
64Mb FPM	£114.50
128Mb FPM	£272.95
128Mb EDO	£209.75
1Mb VRAM	£45.00
1-2Mb VRAM exchange	£55.00
2Mb VRAM	£92.00

Music & Sound Section

Please call for other musical items

MIDI interfaces:	
MIDI Max II internal 1x1x1	£92.75
Parallel Port 1x1x1 (back in stock)	£89.20
RiscStation MIDI drivers & cable	£17.95
RiscStation XG card & cable	£116.95
RiscStation XG card, cable & keyboard	£245.95
Synth Plus software	£58.65
Music & Sound Programmer's Guide	£16.95
Other hardware:	
Evolution MK149 keyboard	£125.00
Fatar SL 760	£450.00
Fatar SL 880	£600.00
Fatar SL 1100	£800.00
Fatar SL 2001	£1050.00
Digital & Analogue Irlam i16 sampler	£175.00
Sound Byte Recorder	£57.50
Yamaha YST-M8 speakers	£45.50
YST-M8 speakers	£36.00
YST-MS28 speakers	£47.00
YST-MS30 speakers	£55.00
YST-M40 speakers	£49.00
YST-M45D speakers	£69.00
YST-M55D speakers	£89.00
Yamaha MU15 sound module	£199.00
Yamaha MU128 module	£744.00
Other software:	
MIDI Support	£18.50
ProSound	£113.95
Rhapsody 4	£94.95
Junior Sibelius	£49.00
Sibelius 6	£99.95
Sibelius 7 Student	£319.95
Sibelius 7	£520.95
Sibelius for PC/Mac is also available	
Optical Manuscript	£259.00
Sound module serial driver	£37.95
Studiosound	£116.95

Other Hardware

Ethernet card (Combi NIC slot)	£116.30
Hard drives & kits	£Call
Mouse (Genius/STD Acorn-compatible)	£19.95
Mouse (PS/2 Logitech)	£14.99
Omega 10BaseT PCI card	£62.25
Omega SCSI 2 PCI card	£72.95
PS/2 pipe convertor for older machines	£23.95
Printers	£Call
Risc PC second slice (no PSU)	£95.00
RISC OS 4 (fitting available)	£109.95
RiscStation internal modem pack	£99.95
RiscStation second serial port	£Call
Scanners	£Call
StrongARM & RISC OS 3.7	£269.00
StrongARM & RISC OS 4	£299.00
Triple serial card	£99.95
ViewFinder card	£235.00

Other Software

Abuse	£20.00
Ankh	£23.00
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Chaos Engine	£19.50
DataPower 2	£165.00
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Descent CDs	£25.00
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FastSpool+	£17.50
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Syndicate+	£26.50
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Books & Manuals

RISC OS Manuals CD	£29.95



Discs (e.g.10x white discs – £4.99, 20x black discs – £6.93, 50x black discs – £13.99)
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Free ISP launched

The Association of Acorn Usergroups (AAUG) have announced the full release of their new freeISP for RISC OS users — AAUG Online which supports full automated sign-up online — with no obligation and, although there have been reported problems with ANT Suite users these are acknowledged and should be ironed out by the time you read these words.

That's certainly better RISC OS support than other ISPs that we might name.

- It's really free. No sign-up fees and no monthly charges.
- Supports sign-up online — no CD required.
- AAUG Online provide customised dial-up scripts for *ANT Suite* and *Dialup*, plus full connection details for those with other software.
- 25Mb of FREE webspace
- Unlimited email addresses on your own sub-domain@aaugonline.net
- Full newsgroup access
- Local-call-rate dial-up access supporting V90 and 64k/128k ISDN
- And for those that really want to, they will also provide .INS files for use on Windoze PCs.
- Free e-mail support, and telephone support if you have to via premium rate number.
- Income from call charges goes into the running of the AAUG

Neil Spellings, AAUG Chairman. E-mail **neil@aaugonline.net** Web: **www.aaug.net** AAUG Online: **www.aaugonline.net**

MasterWorks

Not a new program but a most appropriate grouping. For some time Martin Würthner has been producing modules for *ArtWorks* (from Computer Concepts). Now, for those without the original program, Martin is selling The ArtWorks MasterWorks Edition which includes the original *ArtWorks* program together with a full set of Martin's own modules, bug-fixes and enhancements for only £149 (+£7.50 p&p)

You can find further details at: **www.mw-software.com/software/awmodules/mworks.html**

If you already have *ArtWorks* the New Full Set Collection contains all the ArtWorks modules produced by MW Software (17 modules) for only £80 — save £85 compared to the sum of the individual module prices.

The Update Collection contains the latest five modules: BMExport, Grids, TextArea, JPEGObject and ColourBar for only £60 (a saving of £27.50).

You can pay by cheque or order online with your credit card.

Meeces (mouses? mice?)

In the light of the increasing difficulties in obtaining mice for RISC OS machines, the good news is that Stuart Tyrrell Developments have announced the immediate availability of a quality mouse for RISC OS

Designed for machines which are fitted with the traditional "acorn-style" mouse port (that is, all Acorn-branded machines other than the A7000).

The 3-button Genius branded mice are enabled for use with RISC OS machines using their PS2MouseMini technology, which ensures full compatibility with the "acorn-style" mouse standard.

The mouse plugs directly into the above RISC OS machines, with no requirements for separate adaptors, drivers, or software patches, making it a simple, high quality replacement for both home and education environments.

The STD Standard Mouse costs £19.95 inc VAT and delivery, and is available immediately. Dealer and Education enquiries are welcomed, with discounts available to both for quantity purchase.

Stuart Tyrrell Developments, PO Box 183, OLDHAM. OL2 8FB
E-mail: **Stuart@stdevel.demon.co.uk**
Web: **www.stdevel.demon.co.uk**
Tel: 0845 458 8803 / 01706 848 600
Fax: 0870 164 1604

In brief

original form as an Impression document and as a conversion to *Ovation Pro* format by Richard Hallas. It can be downloaded from: **www.argonet.co.uk/users/mfox/books**

Phoebe lives (?)

If you've acquired a Phoebe case from CTA and aren't quite sure what to do with it (a pair are a touch too large for book-ends) then you might want to take a look at Nicholas Goodall's Web site.

He has given some details of how he has managed to fit a Risc PC motherboard into the Phoebe case. Should you wish to follow suit then please don't complain to us when it all goes wrong — and I'll bet Nicholas says the same!

www.btinternet.com/~woodside21/nick

Acorn User Cover

We've had a number of positive comments about the cover of last month's magazine. The artist, Richard Cassidy, was one of the demonstrators on the Cerilica stand at Wakefield. Although the artwork was derived from a range of sources produced by Richard over some time it was combined in *Vantage* and could have been produced from scratch using *Vantage.*

Arc-Elite joysticks

Want to play the game even better? Get your Acorn-compatible joysticks working with this freeware module from **www.reflection.demon.co.uk**

The module makes use of the Acorn Joystick SWI to read the joystick and converts this to a mouse position compatible with *Elite.*

Contacting AU

news@acornuser.com
John Cartmell

Main feature

One thing that distinguishes our favourite computer platform from others is its GUI — Graphical User Interface. Although it's sometimes called the Desktop the graphical layout on screen, and how elements are moved and used, can never be the same as the top of your desk.

Despite that, some platforms make a better job of it than others. When using Windows I'm constantly being reminded that what's on screen is simply a pretty display of something that works with numbers and letters while with RISC OS the illusion is deeper and I have the effect of being able to manipulate objects on-screen rather than input data.

Even though the RISC OS GUI works well it's particular pleasing when individual programs enhance the effect and make working on the computer even smoother and more intuitive.

One program that is particularly pleasing is *Apollonius*. It's a program that allows you to draw connected lines, points and circles to produce CAD drawings with geometric relationships; having drawn a circle that touches three lines subsequently moving one of the lines will change the size of the circle. Unlike any other CAD program *Apollonius* doesn't have a plethora of icons on a toolbar and relies on your use of the page. To produce a circle touching three lines then you would choose the circle tool and click on the three lines. Hey presto! A circle that touches the three lines — and still touches those three lines while you move one (or more) of those lines.

What always impressed me about the program was the way numbers are input. To produce a line parallel to another you choose the line tool, click on the first line and move to where you want the second line and click where you want to position it; to put it at a fixed distance then you typed in a number instead of clicking Select.

No searching for a box in which to type the number — just type. It's even better for a second line at the same distance — simply press return. Very quickly you feel like you're producing the drawing directly with your hands rather than through a computer.

Cerilica designed a number of similar ideas into *Vantage*. An example is the way the path tool can switch between producing straight lines to curves to follow the cursor all with a click on adjust. All to help you concentrate on your design rather than recourse to menus or the keyboard.

From the beginning I was also impressed by *Vantage's* means of adding colour from a colour bar by selecting the object and dragging the chosen colour to the Fill or Line box. Here however Martin Würthner now holds the number one award for his colour bar module for *ArtWorks*.

The module constantly displays a bar containing all the colours in use at any time. With this one simply drags the colour from the bar to the chosen object and that object is filled with the colour — no need to even select the object. To colour the line (rather than fill) simply drag with Adjust to the object. Now that's intuitive.

I was going to suggest to Martin that graduated and radial fills could be produced by dragging from the colour bar to the appropriate fill box — but before I could compose my e-mail he had sent an upgrade to Colour Bar that does precisely (guess what).

Using Colour Bar colours can be edited by clicking menu on the colour on the colour bar and new colours produced by clicking menu on a blank area of the bar. All easy to remember; all very intuitive and all designed to concentrate the mind on the work itself.

At the heart of Apollonius is the ability to grab hold of an object and move it to a new position and, in that process, re-configure every line, point or circle dependent on that object. With *ArtWorks* and *Vantage* you are limited to changing one particular object (or group) but objects can be moved, turned or expanded by 'getting hold of them' with the mouse and dragging.

It's not so simple to, for example, amend the thickness of lines however and here *DrawWorks* has stolen a march on them with its 'bump arrows' for line-thickness, font-size and so on.

A note to Cerilica and Martin Würthner when they incorporate the idea into *Vantage* and *ArtWorks* — could you please find the means to indicate what the current size/thickness is and how about an option to click on the line thickness arrow and type in a number. Just like *Apollonius*.

Contacting AU

graphics@acornuser.com
John Cartmell



Unloading your mind

Described loftily as the "ultimate download management tool", *LoadMaster* from Warm Silence Software allows RISC OS users to enjoy the same immunity from download failure that is offered users of *GetRight*, *GoZilla* and similar Windows applications. Costing a mere £23.50 inc VAT, *LoadMaster* will take care of your downloads, enabling each listed fetch to be paused, restarted and it can even resume downloading after stalled connections, dropped lines and machine crashes.

Unlike its Windows counterparts, *LoadMaster* has no hidden advertisement server that may be snooping and reporting on your download activities. To install the program, simply copy from the floppy to the Apps directory on your RISC OS machine, and if desired place the supplied start-up file in your **!Boot.Choices.Boot.Tasks** directory. Otherwise double-click *LoadMaster* to start it.

LoadMaster can be configured to use proxy servers for http and ftp fetching to speed up downloads, and most anonymous FTP servers; those that allow public access; expect to be given a log-in password in e-mail address form, which can be set in *Loadmaster's* config option.

Downloading can be started in several ways. Clicking the iconbar icon opens the Current Downloads window with an input box into which you can type a URL, or you can drag the "Link" icon offered by RISC OS browsers into the window.

Make sure that the link is to the actual file for download and not to another HTML page describing it. Having set the source path, a Save box pops up with an icon to be dragged to a destination directory.

LoadMaster Options

FTP Proxy — Machine: www-cache.demon.co.uk — Port: 8080

FTP Email Address: loadmaster@acornuser.com — Username for Anonymous ftp

HTTP Proxy — Machine: www-cache.demon.co.uk — Port: 8080

Extra HTTP Headers — Use \n to separate headers

Number of downloads to start simultaneously: 1 — Save & Set

Using the cache to save cash

A "traffic light" system monitors download progress; an amber light indicates the download is waiting to start; it changes to green with a rolling byte count when downloading starts, and goes red if manually stopped. As each fetch is completed, its list entry is removed and the next starts downloading. *LoadMaster* defaults to one-at-a-time downloading but multiple fetching can be configured.

Whether *LoadMaster* is able to resume downloading a file that has been paused for any reason is down to a combination of ISP, server and Proxy settings, as Robin Watts of WSS explains.

LoadMaster - Current Downloads

Stop	From:	http://www.castle.org.uk/Support/Oregano/demo110.zip	684,129
Fetching	To:	RAM::RamDisc0.$.demo110/zip	1,387,665
Start	From:	ttp://www.castle.org.uk/Support/Oregano/Navaho124beta.zip	???
Ready	To:	RAM::RamDisc0.$.Navaho124beta/zip	???
Start	From:	http://www.netchess.iconbar.com/NetChessD.zip	???
Ready	To:	RAM::RamDisc0.$.NetChessD/zip	???
Start	From:	http://www.mediaweb.connectfree.co.uk/ukphon22.exe	???
Ready	To:	RAM::RamDisc0.$.ukphon22/exe	???

A bit risky downloading to RAM, isn't it?

"*LoadMaster* always tries to continue from the byte it left off at. Whether the server will accept this is up to it. Some proxies also refuse to honour partial fetches. In general, leave proxies disabled wherever possible."

With or without proxies, *LoadMaster* just gets on with the job and takes downloading off your mind.

Web: www.wss.co.uk/
E-mail: info@wss.co.uk

In brief

You were called

Often you can't identify the phone number announced by that rather irritable BT lady when you dial 1471. The UK Telephone code locator maintained by Tim Clark at the University of Warwick Web site can tell you where the call area is, its map location, BT charge information and nearby exchange names.

Just type in either the full number or just the area code, or enter an exchange or place name to find an area code. There's a good selection of other phone information on this site. If you are also a PC user, you can find a downloadable application with similar features at **www.mediaweb.connectfree.co.uk/ukphone.html** UK Telephone code locator **www.warwick.ac.uk/cgi-bin-Phones/nng**

Get wired

Did you know that only two of the four twisted pairs in an Ethernet cable are required for a single network connection? The page at **http://yoda.uvi.edu/InfoTech/rj45.htm** shows the standard wiring colours for both RJ-11 connectors — the little transparent ones that go in the back of modern phones and modems — and for RJ-45 10BaseT Ethernet connectors.

The Orange and Green pairs of wires are designated for Ethernet, and the Blue and Brown pairs for a second Ethernet line or for phone connections. The diagrams on the page also show you how to wire a cross-over cable for linking two machines, and a Y-cable for breaking out the two separate Ethernet circuits.

Contacting me

David Dade:
comms@acornuser.com



Mightier than the sword

This is described as "the authoritative hypertext manual reader for RISC OS", a title I think it is worthy of. *StrongHelp* was originally written by Guttorm Vik and is now maintained by Christian Ludlam (chris@recoil.org). The latest version is 2.74 dated 22nd June 2001, so as you can see, it's still being actively developed.

StrongHelp is arguably the definitive format for producing manuals and reference guides for those not using plain text or HTML.

The beauty of *StrongHelp* is that it's compact, contains the whole manual within a single file and gains over plain text by being able to hyperlink to other pages or even documents.

What's more, there is a huge repository of *StrongHelp* format documentation available on the Web. Christian's own site contains a huge list of reference material in *StrongHelp* format, ranging from programming manuals, SWI calls, HTML introductions and program guides to internet acronyms and RISC style guides.

If you install a 'Manuals' resource directory inside your !Boot structure you can store frequently used manuals so that they can be accessed immediately.

Once *StrongHelp* is installed, a very useful feature becomes available within any compliant text editor, such as *StrongED* or *Zap*, but not *Edit*. This is the ability to call up help for any text underneath the pointer, such as programming help for a particular keyword, as shown in the accompanying screenshot from *Zap*.

Alt+click on 'Else' while writing a PERL program and *StrongHelp* will immediately offer help, if the Perl manual has been installed.

Anyone can create a *StrongHelp* manual using a standard text editor. *StrongHelp* manual pages contain ordinary plain text, with relevant commands and hyperlinks inserted using special *StrongHelp* tags — and, of course, a *StrongHelp* manual is available to help.

Many applications now contain documentation in *StrongHelp* format, so it's a worthwhile utility to add to your system. You never know when you might need it.

You can download a copy from **http://sudden.recoil.org/stronghelp/**

StrongHelp Main Menu

StrongHelp Manuals

Acronyms	Assembly	BASIC	C-Version5
Computers	FileTypes	Inet	InetSocket
InetSWIs	Internet	Machine	Messenger
MiscSWIs	MsgServe	OS	Perl
PlayIt	PythonDocs	ResFind	RFCs
SH-Style	SharedCLib	SparkFS	StarCmds
StrongHTML	SWI	Toolbox	VDU
Wimp	PRMs	Temporaries	

StrongHelp is a freeware product from **Guttorm Vik**

There is a wide range of help files available in this format

Good for grouting

Tyla2, by Mike Williams (**mike@econym.demon.co.uk**) is a utility for quickly and simply creating random tiled backdrops — either for your desktop or Web page.

All tiles are left/right and up/down symmetrical to give smooth tiling. The results are seen instantly, as *Tyla2* automatically updates your pinboard background to display the current pattern. By experimenting with the options in the control panel you can choose different colour schemes, pattern styles and even the amount of 'wobble' in both the X and Y positions. The size of the tile can be specified and you can keep experimenting until you're happy with the results.

Once happy you can save the tile in sprite, clear or JPEG format, although due to the lossy compression of JPEGs, I would recommend saving as a sprite and then converting to a GIF before including on a Web page. You'll also find that using JPEG images as tiled desktop wallpaper tends to slow the machine down as it recalculates the background when you move windows around.

Tyla2 is freeware and can be downloaded from **www.econym.demon.co.uk/other/**

Making space for it all

DiscSpace is a useful little utility written by *ArtWorks* plugin maestro Martin Würthner to show the amount of disc space occupied by the various directories on your computer.

Simply drag an icon from the *DiscSpace* window into any directory on your hard disc. It will then count all the files in each of the directories starting from your chosen directory. This may take a little while if you have a large hard disc. It took around five minutes to calculate the sizes of my original 850MB drive.

Unfortunately, you can't leave it running and disappear into another room for a cup of tea because any errors or warning messages require user intervention to click 'OK'. It did this a few times on both of my drives, invariably triggered by 'Bad archives' which it was unable to read — although manually examining the archives in question opened them without trouble.

When *DiscSpace* has completed it's examination of your drive it displays a graphical chart of the usage, in a 'task-display' bar chart fashion, so you can easily see which directories occupy the most space.

This allows you to organise your discs and see which areas occupy the most space — not surprisingly on my machine, the internet and Web directories!

DiscSpace is freeware and can be downloaded from **www.mw-software.com/ software/ discspace/ discspace.html**

Shortcuts make long delays?

If you ever want a short cut to applications, but don't want to actually copy the application itself, this little utility will simplify things for you.

On loading you are presented with a small window containing two halves: One side is where you can drag an application in order to create a shortcut to it, and the other side allows you to enter a filename and drag the shortcut back out to a Filer window.

Basically, ShortCut will create a dummy application containing both !Boot and !Run files (both can be optionally disabled from the main control window) which will behave just like a regular application that you can double-click on, which in turn will load the original application.

It does this by writing a short !Run file which runs the original application. The sort of thing a more advanced person might do by hand, but *ShortCut* provides a neat and simple way of doing it — a short cut to providing a *ShortCut*! Instructions are provided via the standard interactive help system.

ShortCut was written by Matthew Price and can be downloaded from his Web site at **www.users.totalise.co.uk/~mjprice/archez/apps/short.htm**

Can't get no brighter

StupidPlayer is an MP3 player with a difference from RISC OS newcomers "eQ Research & Development". Why is it different?? Well, for the first time, it allows machines of lower spec than a StrongARM Risc PC to play MP3 music tracks.

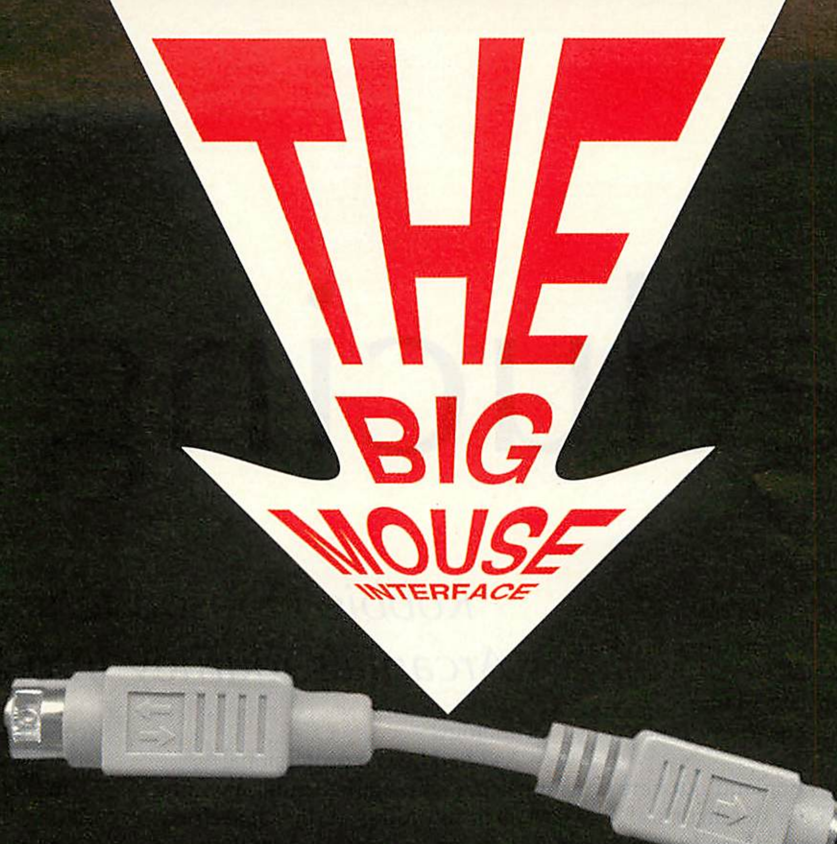
It should work on RiscStation 7500's, Mico's and the Castle A7000+. It's very easy to use, and is invisible to the user. Once *StupidPlayer* has been seen by the Filer, just double-click on an MP3 file in order to start playing it.

The actual quality of the playback sound is dependent on the screen resolution being used, mainly because under current RISC OS hardware the sound is also controlled via the VIDC video controller chip. Unfortunately the sound was rather 'choppy' on my RISC OS 4-based Risc PC, and not having access to one of the machines listed in the help file, means I can't offer a comment on how good the actual sound quality is. However, as you've got nothing to lose — it's freeware — then download a copy from **www.eqrd.net** and try it out for yourself.

Contacting AU

Paul Vigay:
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STD
Stuart Tyrrell Developments


THE
BIG
MOUSE
INTERFACE

Reducing the

Robbie Dobson tells the story of Arcania's journey into the solar age

Solar panels? Yes, we do have solar panels here but they're actually made from triple-layer amorphous silicon and, strictly speaking, it's more of a photon accumulator array, but more of that later.

We moved from England out here to West Wales and our derelict rural farmhouse and outbuildings 18 years ago, and there's not enough space here to list the trials and tribulations we've been through, but anyone who is familiar with the TV Castaways may be interested to know that we have built what we now have from those kind of beginnings. We have lived the life, not just a year's holiday.

Our move was initiated by a desire to try and live in a more self-sufficient, sustainable, eco-efficient way, appreciating and respecting the natural environment. Making a property habitable, establishing vegetable and ornamental gardens, ponds, planting an orchard and enough trees and hedges to encourage a small eco-system takes a good few years — especially when you do it all yourself. But by the late eighties we were ready to take on technology.

As I had been a professional musician with many bands, spending years in recording studios, it seemed only fitting to establish a small recording facility in our cowshed. At this time, MIDI was just beginning to happen and we were using Atari computers running sequencing packages in conjunction with analogue multi-track tape machines.

After running a full-time multi-track recording course for people on Employment Training which ran for 18 months, we began to offer the facility to local bands and musicians. It soon became apparent that bands who recorded material with us, and wanted small runs of cassette copies (200-300), were paying more to the high street printer for a small full-colour run of inlays than they were for our competitively priced studio time.

It was fortunate that around this time we were introduced to our first Acorn, a second-hand A310 (complete with a 20Mb hard drive), and armed with *Impression Junior* and *Artworks*, together with an HP550C colour inkjet printer, we embarked upon our graphic design and printing service — initially to provide a simple solution to cassette inlay printing for people using the recording studio.

Pretty soon we branched out into supplying flyers, posters, business cards, product display packaging and letterheads, and discovered that we could earn more money providing this service to small businesses who wanted small runs of stationery, than we could recording local bands.

We began to concentrate more fully on the graphic design and printing side of our business, giving less time to recording studio work, and started on the never-ending path of upgrading our equipment.

We have been all the way up the processor ladder from ARM2 to StrongARM through A310's, A440's, A540's and A5000's on our way to our present StrongARM Risc PC network, and through the operating system from RISC OS 2 to our present 4.02 status.

We have also been through countless printers but thankfully having started our 'serious' computer use on RISC OS machines, the journey from then to now has been considerably less fraught than that of some of our non-Acorn colleagues.

In the recording studio, the Atari's were phased out in favour of hardware sequencing devices with Smart FSK lock to the multi-track tape machines. At one point we had a 16Mb A540 running an Armadillo A616 which handled all the studio sampling. We still have the A616, a superb device which even has a gold-



Look mum, a solar-powered solar system ... cool! (That's Orrery on the screen)



eco-footprint



Getting the amorphous silicon fitted is no trouble at all – honest

plated SP/DIF (Sony/Phillips Digital Interface). Sadly we can longer use this as it only runs on RISC OS 2 and Arthur.

By the time the Internet happened we already had a solid portfolio of companies, authorities, musicians and craftworkers who we did work for. We have done everything from designing labels for a wholefood company to working on a monthly magazine which was distributed through WHSmith and video composition (shooting, editing and sound recording). We have even worked with VJ's (video jockeys) doing graphics for their stage shows which involved projecting the Internet onto the gable wall of our cowshed.

Through all this time we were known as Springstone. Sadly, back then when we were applying for a domain name, we were informed that Springstone had too many letters to be valid. So after much debate the name Arcania was constructed, really to just serve as a chunk of Web space to call our own — as much for experimental reasons as anything else.

However, we did find that many of the small businesses for whom we had done printing work wanted an Internet presence but did not have a computer, nor any interest in obtaining one. We again offered a simple solution — their pages hosted on our domain, with us providing an e-mail-to-fax service.

As time went on we extended our Web design work to include producing sites for both individuals and companies with their own domains hosted externally from Arcania. We still keep our hand in recording studio work producing the occasional CD, having recently upgraded the facility. We are also involved in a business producing NVQ assessment documentation for use by assessors and verifiers of this system, Arcania both designing and printing the packs.

We never really intended to be called Arcania, but just to have it as a repository for our work. Still here we are, over 100 Web sites later, many of them commercial, piecing together this article on a computer powered by the sun. It has been quite a journey and in many respects we have just begun.

Alternative power

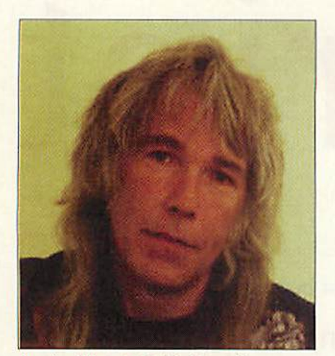
It was never our intention to run any sensitive equipment with alternative power. Our first batch of solar panels were purchased to power an irrigation system in our greenhouse and polytunnel while our wind turbine was bought to power various garden tools and to charge the batteries of our hybridised bicycles. However, once we had ways of generating electricity, it seemed only natural to experiment.

One early experiment had a solar panel on a south wall and a small laser on a north wall. The solar panel fed batteries during daylight hours which in turn fed the laser during night hours. This was done purely as a piece of aesthetic art, but some people who saw it did not see the art and saw a signalling beacon — oh well I suppose inspiration is also a form of flattery.

Back then we just had a 60 Watt array of panels that were fairly old technology. If a shadow fell on just one cell it virtually nullified the whole array and they only produced acceptable power in direct sunlight, so the batteries we were using were small ones, specifically designed with a low self-discharge rate (10% per month).

Such systems require a shunt regulator, a device which takes the raw electrical energy from solar panels, wind turbines or water turbines and feeds it at a steady rate into a battery bank. This device also prevents over-charging of batteries and is equipped with heat sinks to dissipate any excess power. Our model only allowed connection of up to 60 Watts of solar panels.

I was always keen on the concept of the NetComputer and it was while researching this device that we received a brochure from NetChannel. The brochure told me


Ageing hippy? Robbie himself

nothing I didn't know already but there was one little quote from Herman Hauser that really cut through. Referring to the NC he wrote, "All you need is a phone line for your electrons and a TV for your photons".

If this was a soundbite, I was well and truly bitten. To convert wild photons from the sun to electrons, re-arrange them using a computer and have the result shining back at you in photons from a LCD monitor — now that is art. Technology is just a way to make it happen.

Make it so

In order to power a computer with this system we knew we had a challenge in store. It's one thing storing power in batteries and running various devices at 12 volt DC, but quite another running sensitive equipment which requires a 240 volt AC supply. We already had a standard 12 volt DC to 240 volt AC inverter connected to the wind turbine system which allowed us to run various power tools.

This is what is known as a 'modified square-wave' inverter which essentially outputs 240 volt AC current, but for sensitive equipment such as computers it is advisable that the power supplied be in the form of a pure sinewave and this required the purchase of a inverter of this type. Current provided through such a device is far purer than that which comes out of your general mains socket and effectively gives you laboratory quality power, even from a humble 12 volt battery.

When this system was set up, it took two people to turn on the computer and the whole thing was a bit of a nightmare, especially as we were using using various banks of small batteries which had been charged by our solar panels during sunny days, but we persevered and achieved a landmark project in time for the Millennium.

This was called the Solunium and was essentially a solar/lunar calendar constructed entirely using a solar powered computer. Being that we have lived in a Celtic land for so long, the calendar was based heavily on ancient ways of measuring time and included the rising and setting times of the sun and moon on each day, together with the moon's passage through the astronomical signs of the zodiac.

The location we chose for the sun and moon rise and set times was Stonehenge as it seemed particularly appropriate, being one of the earliest 'computers' for analysing celestial data.

In the past much raising of crops was done by the moon, depending upon which sign of the zodiac it was in, and we used astronomical rather than astrological charts from which to derive our data since in reality, the constellations have moved in their relation to the earth and moon since the early mappings of the zodiac in Babylonian times which many modern day astrologers still use.

To most of you this will no doubt sound like a load of old 'hippy codswallop' but then many of you will have been herded nicely into towns and cities where you can't even see the stars properly at night and your horizon is extremely small — the sun being something that glares at you through the traffic smog.

Out here in rural Britain, on a clear night the stars are breathtaking — on a clear night you can see forever. Our horizons are extensive and the forest beneath us oxygenates the air. So what if I am an old hippy? Which one of us is best equipped to deal with a sustainable future?

The researching of this calendar was extremely informative as to charting the maximum amount of suntime available to a panel array and obtaining the best position for the panels relative to equinoxes and solstices.

When the sun is at it's zenith over Greenwich it takes the earth a further 15 minutes to rotate before it reaches it's zenith out here, in reality the sundial is more accurate than the atomic clock.

Planetary who?

Planetary Initiatives (whose article you may have read in last month's issue of this magazine) come at you from the moral high ground but we didn't mind that at all.

As our lifestyle and working environment are both well equipped to deal with such onslaughts we accepted the challenge with relish.

We are very pleased to be involved with their Planeteye project as both consultants and Web site designers as it aims to connect everyone from international companies down to individual consumers with the real issues involved in moving towards a sustainable and secure future for the world's population.

The Project Planeteye Web site will contain a host of educational information as well as an opportunity for all people to take part in the only debate which really matters, and our involvement with this initiative is already serving to give us access to information which will enable us to further develop our best practice approach to our lifestyle and work.

The extremely low turnout of voters in the recent General Election in this country has, in some quarters, been blamed on the politicians' inability to connect with the population resulting in many people feeling disconnected from the whole process.

Tony Blair, in a speech at the UN General Assembly, New York on June 23, 1997 stated that he wanted all local authorities in the UK to adopt Local Agenda 21 strategies by the year 2000. This has clearly not taken place as very few people have actually heard of the initiative. If Mr Blair's request had been fulfilled, people in this country may well have felt far more 'connected' to the

political system having been empowered at a local level to voice their opinions and for those opinions to have been heard.

The respective governments in power since 1992 have had since that date to implement Local Agenda 21 and the follow-up summit to Rio is to be held next year in Johannesburg — we can only hope that the newly elected administration will fulfil its obligations in this area.

In the meantime Project Planeteye will be reaching out to inform and educate individuals and companies alike of the principles behind the Rio Declaration on Agenda 21 and will seek to inspire them to become engaged in the process.

Prior to our involvement with Project Planeteye we had already accepted the Rio Declaration on Agenda 21 made at the Earth Summit in 1992 and have been since that date working towards fulfilling those principles, and informing people at a local level of their implication.

The big step

Up until recently, Arcania was based in the lower ground floor of a cottage attached to our farmhouse complete with beamed ceiling, Rayburn stove and views over the surrounding countryside but, in order to seriously implement alternative power sources, relocation to one of our outbuildings was necessary.

We decided to integrate Arcania with the workings of our recording studio, utilising part of the live area to house our computer system. Arcania is now based in the cowshed.

When we installed our initial wind and solar systems it was purely as a working blueprint to gain experience with both technologies. Technological advancements in all aspects of renewable energy and resource management are cracking on apace and our extensive research over the past few years into renewable energy sources has brought to light the technological advances in these areas.

Previously we thought wind and water turbines were the best way to harness naturally occurring energy here in Britain but recent advancement in photovoltaics has caused us to rethink. Amorphous silicon is one such advancement.

Light reaches the earth on three frequencies — red, green and blue. Older panels solely responded to the red frequency and this is only available from direct sunlight. The most recently developed solar panels can also generate power from the green and blue frequencies thereby rendering them far more useful for the average British climate — they still generate power on overcast days and even when it is raining.

Multi-layer amorphous silicon is one such advancement and it is this type of panel which we have decided to run with. Also, should shadow fall over part of a panel, it is only the efficiency of the area in shadow that is slightly impaired and another big plus about multi-layer amorphous silicon as a composite material is that it is flexible and quite resilient too, coming with a 10 to 20 year guarantee. Unbelievable as it may seem, you can blast holes in this material with a shotgun and it will still work.

It was agreed with Planetary Initiatives that for World Environment Day (June 5) that we should publish the Project Planeteye Web site using 100% solar power. We also decided to use this date for the establishment of a serious commitment to renewable energy. This involved the installation of a completely new system.



Can't see anybody's house from here

Our new array is based around a 40 Amp charge controller, designed for photo-voltaics and similar to a shunt regulator, fed by four 64 watt, 3.88 Amp amorphous silicon panels, and power is now stored using large, deep cycle 110 Ahr batteries, the DC current being converted to AC through our new sine wave inverter.

Our total system consists of 300 watts of photovoltaic and 250 watts of wind generated power. We are fully expecting this system to deliver on average at least a couple of kilowatts per day and hence enough power to run two of our Risc PCs for the duration of a working day.

This would also be sufficient to power a substantial amount of the studio control room audio equipment, including our main mixing desk. If it doesn't, we'll simply expand the system.

The American mindset seems to be that 'real' men don't save the environment, 'real' men drill for oil. Two days before World Environment Day I was working on a roof with an angle-grinder installing our new photovoltaic array, and that seemed real enough to me. Send me up a couple of these 'real' men and I could pull them off their feet using a 12 volt winch powered by the sun, and see how real they find that.

Gung-ho-ho

Energy providers in the UK have pledged that by 2010, 10% of the power they supply will be generated from renewable sources. At Arcania, right here — right now, we can offer Web site design and publishing powered by 100% renewable sources.

The reasons we have used RISC OS based technology for all these years are not just it's a native technology (though this is also encouraged by the principles of Agenda 21) but when you take into consideration efficiency, functionality, sustainability, security and resources, nothing else comes close.

On top of that you have a extremely low TCO factor (total cost of ownership), and low price entry-level machines right through to powerful top-end workhorses. So you see, you're not just building / selling / using RISC OS systems or just writing software for them, you're helping to save the planet, mate. You're part of a solution. Other folks are still at the "my rock's bigger than your rock" stage. **END**

Getting the

A*corn User* could not be produced without e-mail. It is certainly true that the phone is a better way of getting people to get their articles in on time but the actual delivery of the articles and pictures has been through the Internet almost exclusively for over five years.

The same goes for almost all adverts whether originating on RISC OS or any other platform. As a result I need a very reliable e-mail/news reader, something that's not going to quibble receiving a 6Mb picture or a short text message.

But more than that with a whole range of departments I have to be able to compartment incoming messages into appropriate sections, filter out the vast quantities of spam e-mail that comes pouring down the line — since the e-mail addresses are on the Web site and get collected regularly.

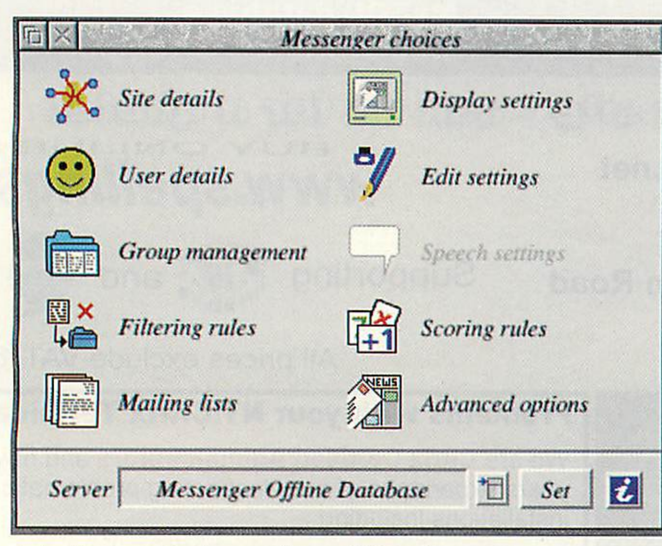
Now it was a matter of sheer chance whether I went for *Pluto* or *Messenger* and in my case the luck fell to the latter. However this is perhaps just as well since *Pluto* is not receiving a great deal of attention or development. Meanwhile *Messenger* has been under continuous development and the commercial version *Messenger Pro* has just reached official version 2.5.

I made the jump from a fairly early version (1.81) up to the current version so this is review will take into account some differences that appeared in versions from 1.81 as if they are new while the truth is that updates have been issued regularly through the users e-mail list.

Just a reader

Compartmenting tasks to dedicated applications which then interact for the users benefit has always been a hallmark of RISC OS applications, most obviously between DTP and graphics applications. But the Internet has been another area where this divide and conquer approach has proved very effective.

Having said that the usual result of this has been that particular applications tend to dominate in the specific market these receive the most attention and the most usage while the "lesser" applications fall by the wayside and become forgotten. Survival of the fit.



A nice friendly set of options, not all are available to all users

Messenger Pro has never been anything but a Usenet news and e-mail reader, it doesn't connect to the Internet and it doesn't fetch or send e-mail or news. Given a database of messages it provides facilities to read them and create new ones. At its basic level that is all it does — it just happens to be rather good at it.

Connection to the 'Net is done through a dialler (of which there are a few options: dedicated diallers from whatever suite you choose plus *Socketeer* and *DialUp*), while fetching and sending of messages via e-mail or as news is done by the "transports", favoured applications currently being *POPstar* and *Newshound*.

Meanwhile the message storage is popularly catered for by the *Newsbase* application and its associated *NewsDir* database. *Messenger Pro* has its own *MsgServe* application but that uses the same *NewsDir* structure for storing messages. *MPro* is perfectly happy using either *Newsbase* or *MsgServe*, and if another program came along that supported the same command set, it would use that as well. Monolithic suites (such as the (ex)*ANT Suite*) use their own storage facilities.

The overall system works very well and though it may seem complex everything works together seamlessly and once running you don't notice the separateness of the parts. Integration is the key.

What we're looking at here is just *Messenger Pro 2*, just the bit that reads and creates messages.

Installation

Upgrading from an older version of *MPro* is easy — save your old version and replace it with the new version. As no data (messages or any user and configuration information) is held by *MPro* internally the new version will

message

Steve Turnbull reports on the latest upgrade to the popular e-mail/news reader

simply take over from where the old one left off with no change. Theoretically that was the position I was in however it wasn't quite the same. Up to this point I had always run *Newsbase* separately to *MPro*, which meant that I always had two icons on the iconbar, one for each.

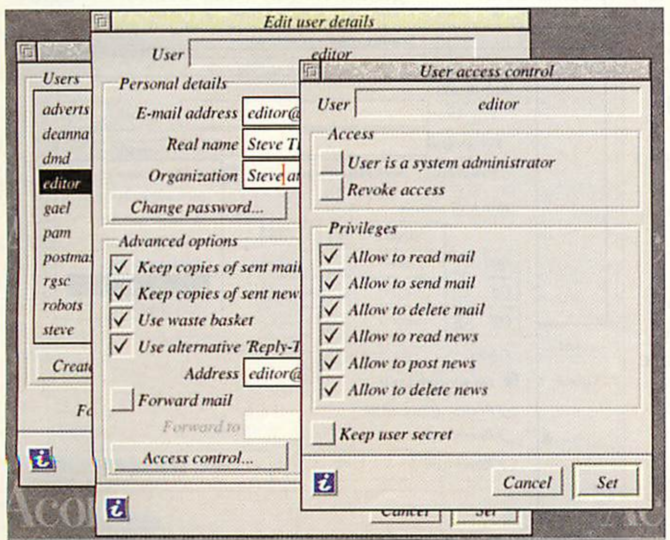
With the new version I did what I knew I could do: move *Newsbase* into the Servers directory of *MPro*. The upshot of this is that — assuming you want to use *Newsbase* (why else would you do that?) its icon no longer appears even though it is running. This gives me that little bit more space on an iconbar that can get rather busy from time to time.

Being the naturally cautious type at first I continued to use *Newsbase* for handling the messages but in the interests of this review I took the plunge and converted to *MsgServe*. There was a touch of selfishness involved as well since the version of *Newsbase* I have been using did not allow all the features of *MPro* to be used so the review would be incomplete.

It can take quite a while to convert the entire database it depends on how many messages you have, and if you do have a number of users and folders already set-up you will have quite a job converting it all over to the new system.

When *MsgServe* recognises an existing *Newsbase* set-up it will do some work automatically but you will probably have to set up all the filters that direct e-mail to the correct folders. It took me about 45 minutes to do all mine although it did give me the opportunity to simplify what had developed into a very complex set of users and filters — I like to keep all my separate tasks truly separate.

If you haven't had an e-mail set-up before *MPro* takes you through a number of installation windows which a pretty clearly described in the instructions. Even here unfortunately an absolute beginner could potentially fall foul of the complex needs of Internet software. However most absolute beginners will buy the complete *DialUp* package from R-Comp in which case there won't be a problem.



Individual users can be easily configured to quite a detailed level

A quick comment about the manual: please stop putting in multiple '!'s, it is bad enough using them at all in a manual but having up to four or five is so unprofessional.

One thing is certain: configuring *Messenger Pro* from scratch is considerably easier than it used to be.

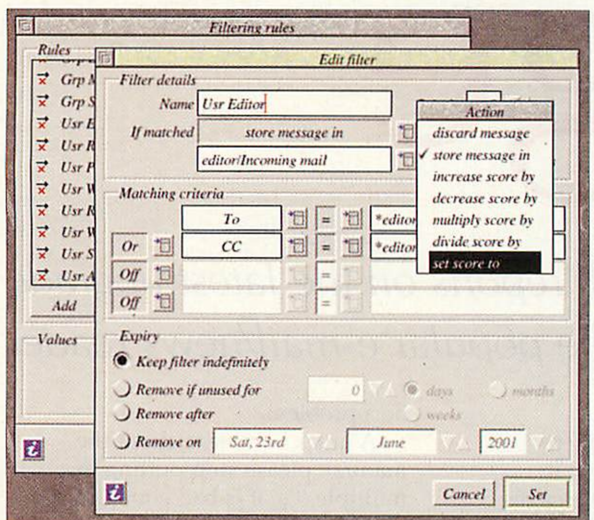
You have mail

To see what kind of facilities *MPro* provides let's take a look at the path that incoming mail takes as it comes in. When your mail transport logs on it will either download all the mail in one go, or it may download different "mail packs" which are named for the user they are downloaded for.

In the latter case *MsgServe* will automatically look at the file's name and if it matches a user name then that packet will be given to that user without using any filtering. However, more often than not, all mail for all the users will come down all mixed up. In this case you need filters to split them up.

Taking a look at the situation at *Acorn User* we have, for example, the "editor" e-mail name and the "adverts" e-mail name but all e-mails come through mixed together. So there is an Editor filter which directs mail to the editor if the "To:" or "Cc:" header contains "editor", another filter checks to see if either of these headers contains "adverts" in which case they are directed to the incoming mail of that user.

But as you can see from the screenshot filters are very versatile,



Filters can be used for more than just allocating a message to a folder

you can set one up to be automatically expired after a fixed amount of time, after it hasn't been used for a specified time and for removal on a certain date.

Messages themselves can either by directly stored in a specific mailbox, newsgroup or folder, or it can be assigned a score in which case it is then passed to the next filter. In this case the next filter could be used to check a further condition. Each time a filter is completed a check is made on the current score of the message and if it is below a threshold it will be deleted.

The order in which filters are executed is controlled by a priority setting which is any integer — the highest is used first then the next lowest and so on down. Conditions or criteria allow many of the headers to be checked for content; plus you can (at a potentially large time penalty) check the body of the message; its line count; or its overall size.

Once through the filtering system a message will have been allocated to one of the three types of storage: It can be in a user's Incoming mail, in a folder, or in a newsgroup. Folders are further sub-divided into global folders that can be accessed by any user; private folders only available to the user they belong to; and mailing lists.

One of the cleverest ideas in *Messenger Pro* is the ability to treat an e-mail mailing list like a newsgroup — which in fact it more-or-less is, just that it's distribution method is e-mail and directed to a specifically known group of people. The mailing list concept makes it easy for a member of the list to reply either to the list as a whole or to an individual who has sent a posting.

So now you select a user, in earlier versions you either clicked the iconbar icon with Select to open the Incoming mail, or with Adjust to open the Main groups list (which would normally contain the Incoming mail, among others).

One of the new options is to have the Main groups automatically opened on selection of the user. So with a list of groups in front of you double-click to open a list of mail. This is where the second set of filtering comes into play.

What's the score?

While filtering is a global operation, scoring applies only to specific groups belonging to a specific user. The groups it applies to can include wildcards so, for example, all comp.sys.acorn newsgroups could be selected in one scoring rule.

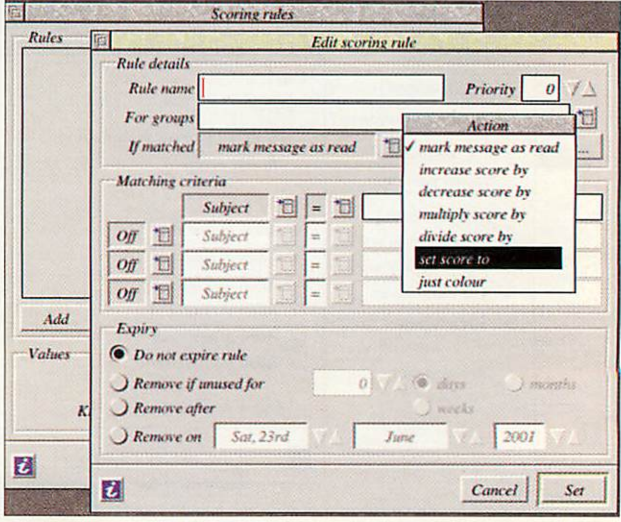
Similar expiry facilities exist for scoring rules as for filters; likewise the matching criteria are much the same though less extensive. And in the same was as for filters a message simply killed, or can be given a score which can be increased or decreased by subsequent rules and if the score goes below a certain value the message is killed.

Scoring at this stage has an additional use there are a whole set of sorting options by which you can specify the order in which messages are displayed on screen. One of those is "By score", so you can arrange for a system by which the messages in, say, a newsgroup are ordered by relevance to your personal interests with the most relevant ones appearing at the top.

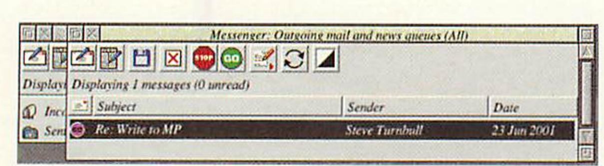
The final option in the scoring rules allows messages to be colour coded if the criteria specified are matched successfully. So if there is one particular contributor to a mailing list always has something interesting to say you can mark him green and see what threads he's contributed to at a glance.

Speaking of threads there has been an enhancement that makes threads prettier and clearer to read which is shown in the screenshot. Apparently there have also been more "under the hood" changes to make threading work better but that's a difficult thing to test or illustrate so we'll just have to take R-Comp's word for it.

The list display of messages in a group window has been thoroughly



Kill-filing is made easy with the scoring system, but it can do far more than that



You can control outgoing messages as easily as incoming ones

revamped and made completely configurable. The column widths can be dragged to whatever you prefer and the columns themselves can be dragged to move their positions relative to other columns.

Plus there is now a whole selection of different columns you can chose from, or omit — as you can see from the screenshot.

Writing messages

Another area that has changed is in the area of writing messages — but more in the direction of simplification than complexity which is very good news.

With lots of facilities being added the Send mail dialogue box had been getting more and more complex. So instead the authors of *MPro* have now gone back to a really simple dialogue box which is fine for most purposes with a big button which replaces it with the full, very complex, dialogue box if you want to do something more clever.

Perhaps more importantly there is now an extra button marked "Defer" which allows you to save a message for the time being and come back to it later. Previously you would lose any e-mail messages you were writing if you changed user. Now you can save them for later — also useful if you are writing a wrathful reply that you might regret later. Maybe some systems should be configured to "Always defer".

There have been improvements in the signature area as well: You can have multiple signatures and select the one you want from a menu but, in addition, individual folders (of whatever variety) can be configured with a preferred signature and "From:" e-mail address.

Having written your message and sending it off to the outgoing queue you may suddenly realise you want to edit it by switching to a user who also has administrative control of the system you can display the outgoing queues in a window that looks like a standard group window apart from a slightly different toolbar.

From here you can delete, hold and edit an outgoing message with the same interface as you have when reading or creating messages normally — a definite improvement.

Sending messages is performed in the usual way that you do it — usually by activating whichever dialler you normally use. *Messenger Pro* can automatically trigger a fetch if you use R-Comp's *DialUp* as well. This is a place where some more standardisation would be useful, perhaps an option to either tell *DialUp* to log-on or run another program which would allow all other diallers to be integrated as well.

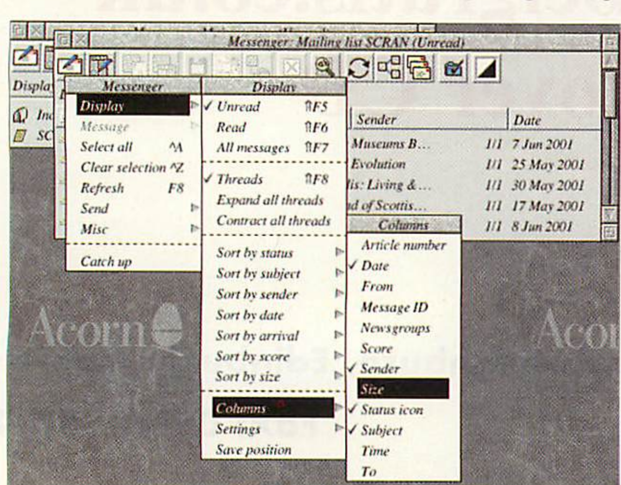
Summing up

This review was originally intended to be a maximum of three pages and I have had to restrain myself in describing everything — I've completely missed the ability to store URLs from messages while offline with just a click and then launch all of them when logging on — wastebaskets, additional save/print options, PGP (and GnuGP) support. There's just so much.

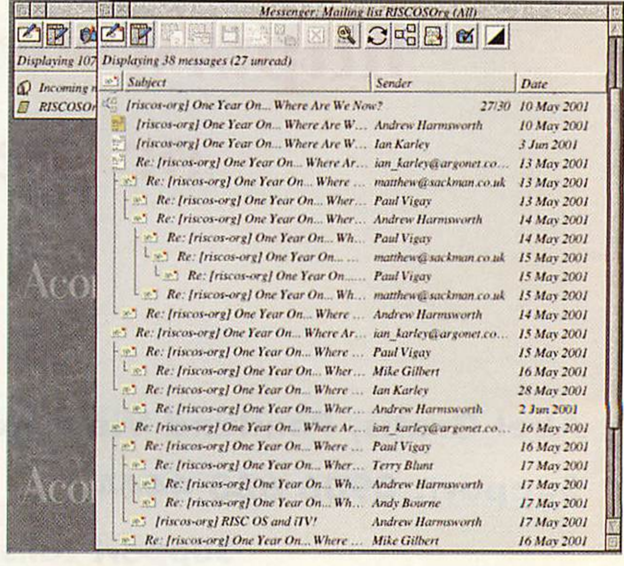
Messenger has always been a good program and this version is improved in all areas. Excellent — I look forward to the next one, though it's difficult to imagine what could be added now. **END**

Product details

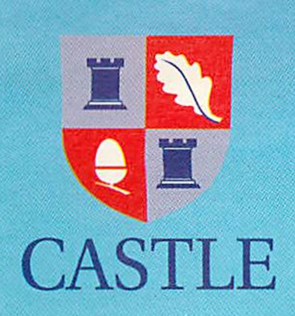
Product:	Messenger Pro 2
Price:	Please see advert for complete pricing scheme, VAT applies.
Supplier:	R-Comp, 22 Robert Moffat, High Legh, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 6PS
Tel:	(+44/0) 1925 755043
Fax:	(+44/0) 1925 757377
E-mail:	rcomp@rcomp.co.uk
Web:	www.rcomp.co.uk



A wide range of possible columns can be added if you have the space for it



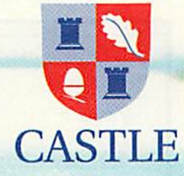
Prettified display for threaded groups



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Get yourself

Graham Young gets himself sorted out

A *larm* is one program that I always used to have running. I try to be organised and set up the necessary alerts using it — particularly for warnings of birthdays and other anniversaries. But *Alarm* isn't really very versatile and while it has been okay for basic stuff — including initiating logging on every 12 hours — it leaves a lot to be desired.

I had been aware of *Organizer* for quite a while but as it was free I hadn't taken the trouble to look at it. When i did eventually take a look I found a very competent and versatile program — that will teach me not to assume that free is the same as bad quality.

As you would expect installing *Organizer* is a simple matter of dragging the program from the download archive — whether you have the less competent old version or the highly expensive, brand new £10 one. Let's face it, programmers in the RISC OS market need all the encouragement they can get and giving them some pocket money can't be a bad thing.

Incidentally if you, like me, had any doubts about the possibilities of free (or at least very cheap) RISC OS software let me tell you that a dyed-in-the-wool PC user has been *very* impressed with *Organizer*. We can get very complacent about the quality of stuff we really enjoy.

As it is virtually free one thing you don't get is a paper manual, luckily this program is very intuitive plus it does have an online *StrongHelp* manual which covers all the basics you will need.

Under normal circumstances *Organizer* is the kind of application you will want loaded all the time so deciding where to install it is fairly simple: *Organizer* behaves properly on pre-RISC OS 4 systems that are using the !Boot structure you put it in **!Boot.Choices.Boot.Tasks** directory which ensures it is run on start-up.

For RISC OS 4+ systems you can put it in a directory of its own, I like to have a top-level directory called Applications, in which I have sub-directories for each application. With RISC OS 4 you can arrange to automatically run an application from wherever it normally resides on the hard disc using the configure option.

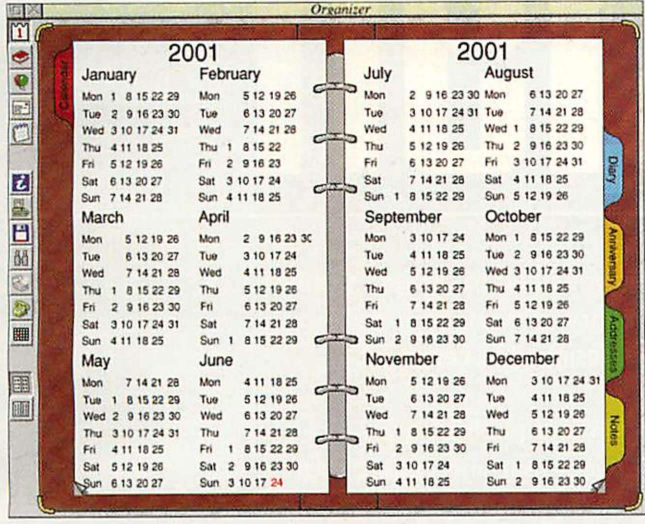
All the data is stored in **Choices:Organizer** which means that it works fine across multi-user networks as well as on standalone machines.

Organizer is a complete replacement of *Alarm* — and provides far more besides — down to the iconbar icon. My personal preference is for an analogue clock with second hand, which *Organizer* will give me without trouble.

The icon automatically appears on the far right of the iconbar just inside the Switcher and Monitor icons though you can switch that off and just have it appear wherever it can depending on the applications booted up before it. Personally I prefer it to appear at standard position which makes it feel far more

More options than you can shake a very long stick at

organized



The calendar doesn't take a great deal of understanding

like an integral part of the system.

While the icon can be a clock (analogue, digital, 12 or 24 hour, and even configured showing date in pretty much any format you want) it can also be a simple icon or something showing total free memory. As I use a separate memory free application — Acorn's *MemFree* circa 1993 — I am happy with the clock.

I have to say that with more recent programs the level of configurability seems to have been increasing exponentially. This is certainly a worthy goal as long as the options are sensible and they certainly seem to be in Organizer which has seven complete configuration sections, three of which are long scrollable lists. However the defaults are easy enough to live with and every section has a Help button which brings up the appropriate section of the online manual to explain what these options actually do.

Once upon a time there was no such thing as a Filofax — or to be non-trademarked "personal organiser". These little folders with replaceable stationery accompanied the Yuppy boom and suddenly anybody who wanted to be anybody had one. If you were really serious you had a "time management system".

Around that time there were lots of attempts to do something similar on computer systems and probably the most successful on RISC OS machines was *Almanac* from Stallion Software. Unfortunately the company went to the final round-up and *Almanac* faded away.

But as a means of keeping addresses, diary dates and anniversaries the personal organiser was and is very useful. And what *Organizer* does is provide the most useful features of personal organiser to your desktop and does it in a clean, intuitive way — it even looks like one but not to the point of interfering with usefulness.

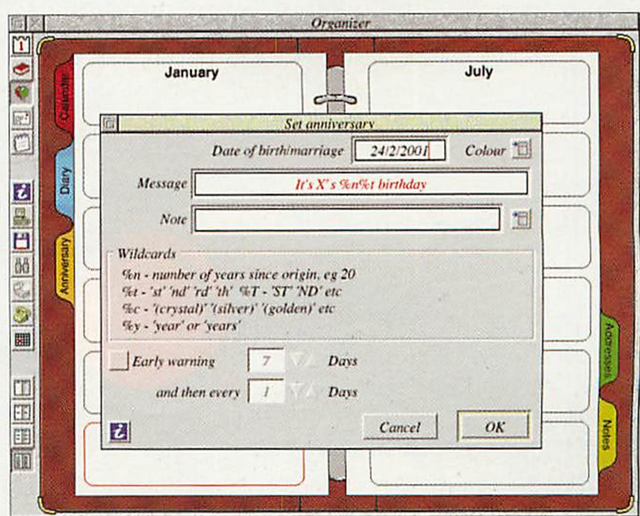
When the program first runs it opens to the first page which contains the program's name, version, credits and the name of the current user (when you configure it). Down the lefthand side (or across the top if configured) are three groups of icons. The first set of these small buttons allow the currently displayed section to be changed (as do the tabs down the side in the usual place).

The second group are general program operations: launch the interactive online help; open the configure window; save the current data; open the search window; print data; dial via the modem; and open today's diary page.

The final set of icons vary depending on which section of the application is currently open but usually have to do with the layout of the page of the section being displayed except in the case of Notes.

Another pair of icons that appear on each page are the *turn page* icons in the bottom left and right which very obviously turn to the page before or the next one. If there is one, if there isn't no turn-page appears.

By default the order of sections is: Calendar (red); Diary (blue); Anniversary (orange); Addresses (green); and Notes (yellow). The order and colours can be changed, and sections can be omitted. I'll now take each of these more-or-less in order though I will be spending most of the time on the addresses as this



The simple anniversary section and the window for creating a new one — be the envy of all your more forgetful relatives

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Available overseas from the following Cerilica stockists:



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The Netherlands



a4com
Germany



The Image Factory
Australia



New Zealand

Date control as you've never seen it before – very thorough

section is the most complex in that it provides the most extensive features.

Give me a date

The first three sections are devoted to time: Calendar is simply a list of dates in a year. By default it's the current year but you can go forward or back.

You can show a year a page which is a bit compressed, or better a year over the two pages. The current day is highlighted in red and clicking on a date takes you direct to the diary page for that date. Easy.

The Anniversary section is pretty simple as well you get a display of each month in a year. Each month has a box which displays any anniversary in that month.

The add anniversary dialogue lets you put in the date of the birth or marriage (or other event). You then enter a message that is displayed in the anniversary section but also in the diary. The message can contain special codes which are replaced in the actual output.

The codes can be used to calculate the actual "age" of the event, so it will tell you the age of the person, or how long a marriage has lasted. In the case of marriages you can also have a code which tells you the material associated with the anniversary (gold, silver, pearl, leather or whatever).

That was pretty much the limit of its capabilities originally but it has now been extended to allow early warnings — you can control how much in advance you are warned and how often thereafter until the event itself. Very handy for people who forget, this feature alone could increase your credibility dramatically.

Anniversaries can be re-edited by clicking with Select if there's an error — I have to say that my own father had the wrong day for his own birthday for twenty years — or you can copy by clicking with Adjust. A final feature of anniversaries is that you can provide a link to a Note maybe you want to make some notes about what a person has asked for for their birthday.

The diary section rounds off the date/time sections and basically allows you to set single or repeating events which can give pre-warnings. The events can be display only or give a warning or they can be Task Alarms which basically means they are filenames that are run so any file operation can be launched. I use task alarms to invoke an e-mail fetch every twelve hours.

For a new event you enter the message that will appear in the diary, you can set up task alarms so that a sensible text message is displayed instead of the filename. You can change the colour of the message and link the event to a note just as with anniversaries.

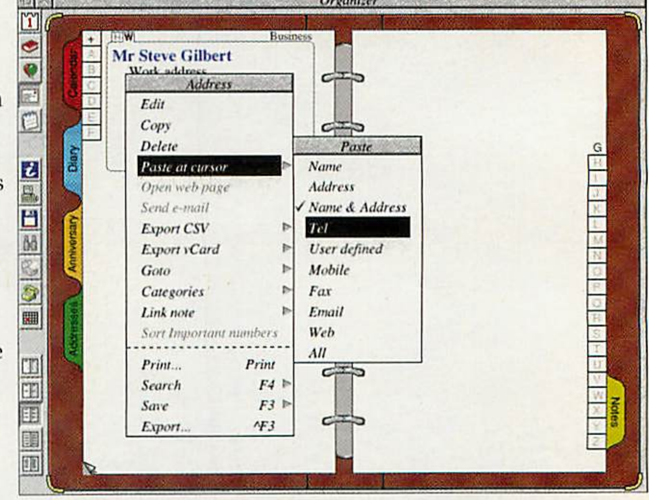
There are a whole set of option switches controlling the exact behaviour of this event most of which are self-evident. Events can stored in a journal to show what happens day by day but, for example, you might not want regularly repeating alarms to clog it up.

The repeating alarm options are very extensive: you have the basic repeat by minutes, hours, days, weeks, months or years; then there's the "penultimate tuesday of every third month" style.

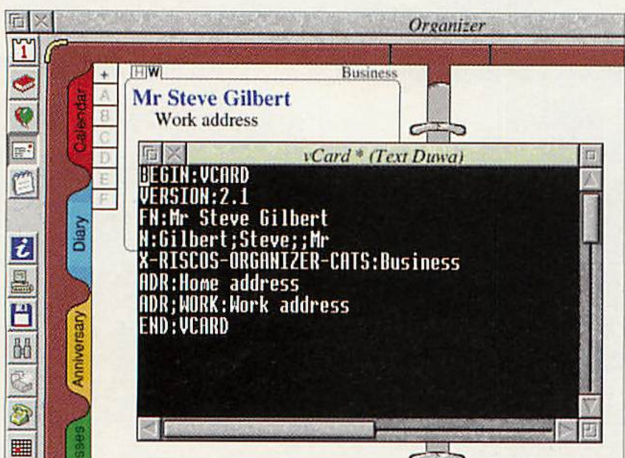
These were available in *Alarm* but what that application didn't have was the ability to set a finish date for a repeating event. Nor did it let you specify dates where the event should not appear — like holidays.

Plus you can set whether every future repeat appears in the diary or whether only the very next one should be displayed — again useful for regularly repeating events. When

See the home/work tabs plus the category display



Put that name and address into any other application easily



The vCard is a popular format, here you can see the layout

you want to edit event you can edit either the one you clicked on only, or you can edit the entire series if it's a repeating event.

All in a name

The Address section is one that has had an enormous amount of work done on it and is certainly radically different from its former incarnation.

On the surface of course it is still just a way of storing a person's name and address and other contact details but now it has been expanded to allow home and work contact details as two completely different sets of addresses, phone numbers and URLs.

You can link an address to one or more categories, these start as Business and Personal, but you can add any category you want — or edit and delete them.

There's a button to check the address against the *AddressIt* software which would be useful in a business environment or if you were particularly pedantic. There are fields to enter phone number, fax number and mobile, e-mail and Web addresses; and you can link a note.

But more than that there is an interface to add any number of additional fields as well so if you have a particular need you can put it in. Something else which crops up is that if, for example a person has two phone numbers about no fax you will use the fax space for the second number, that's obvious. What is not obvious is that if you enter something like this:

```
Phone2: 020 9876 7654
```

Into the fax field then, in the address display, the word "fax" will be replaced by "phone2". I discovered this by accident but *Organizer* goes much further:

Multiple phone numbers (or other data) can be held in a single field by simply separating them with a semi-colon, they will shown on separate lines in the address display. More than that, you can prefix one or more of these "sub-fields" with a string ending in a colon and have the sub-field data prefixed with that string. The manual does point out that this particular feature could easily confuse another database if the information is exported so should be used with care.

The detailed picture of the address shows how the different categories are displayed clicking H or W displays the home and work details respectively while clicking on the categories list in the top right displays the list of categories so you can set them without going to the edit window.

If there is one thing that feels wrong with this particular section it is that the way of editing or adding an address is radically different from the other sections and doesn't simply pop-up a dialogue box as you would expect.

You can see from the screenshot that there is insufficient room on the default page display to all the field options so switching to a separate dialogue would give more consistency and better working space. What we have is perfectly workable but not consistent.

Once you've got the address information into Organizer what can you do with it? Clearly you can just look stuff up but there is so much more: Clicking on an e-mail address will invoke a send mail in your favourite e-mail program; clicking on a Web address sends the URL to your Web browser; clicking a phone number causes it to be sent to a modem or put out the dial tones through the computer's speaker.

Dialling out this way can also have phone number withholding, automatic international code insertion, missing out the local code if you are dialling a number with the same local code as you. You can add in delays to the dialling to deal with any switching time plus if you use your phone to call your bank for details you can insert a code which stops the account number and PIN from being displayed in the book.

One very handy option is the ability to type an address direct from *Organizer* into another application, for this to work the widow receiving the text must have the input caret (yellow title bar) you then click Menu over the address in question and go to the Paste at cursor option and select one of the options therein — usually it will be name and address. once one of these options has been selected you only have to click the Paste at cursor option rather than going into the sub-menu.

And finally...

The Notes section is a new section which simply allows a set of named and numbered notes to be entered as completely free text. They can stand alone or they can be linked to any of the other record types giving you the chance to connect additional information as needed.

Web and e-mail addresses are highlighted in the notes and double-clicking on them will launch an e-mail writing window or the Web browser.

I have tried to cover the most important features of *Organizer*, it is a very capable program and nowadays I don't really know how I would cope without it. The price is, frankly, ridiculous — this program is worth at least five times as much if not more. Chris Morison is to be congratulated, a real winner. END

Product details

Program:	Organizer
Price:	£10 (£11 if ordered over Internet by credit card)
Supplier:	Chris Morison, 4 Arley Close, Macclesfield, Cheshire SK11 8QP
E-mail:	organizer@morison.net
Web:	www.organizer.morison.net

The big EXPO

The Big Ben Exhibition is less known to those of us in the UK — being something that happens over there. But in Europe it is the premier RISC OS show of the year and in this instance if you missed it you missed a very exciting show.

Yes it is true that the Omega was not working but we had already been informed that could be the case due to the problems at generating the code for the FPGA's. At the show it was mentioned that those problems were over because MicroDigital had received a new code generator which worked far better.

David Atkins dared to say that production of the motherboard was now just three to four weeks away ... we will keep him to that promise. We think that the Omega should be in modest numbers available around August / September.

RiscStation did not arrive at the show due to Roy Heslop being ill. It left a notable gap on the stand reserved for them. By surprise the stand was filled with our Belgium fellow users who had a huge Calcomp plotter run from a Risc PC which could print endless posters five feet wide which were magnificent.

One of the print outs was the cover of Acorn Publisher number 40 with the Esselte design made by Henk Huinen. It was a very nice gesture they made plots for various people. This was certainly the best entertainment of the show.

R-Comp was there in force with their Internet and games software and they were always busy when I went to talk to them. Cerilica was demonstrated by Paul Reuvers, Chris Hornby was selling his products and Paul Beverley the Archive Magazine.

The guys from POSsum were satisfied with the amount of interest they received for their POS system, even though the software had still to be adjusted to the Dutch market many contacts were made with possible buyers.

Henk Huinen was at the stand of Desk and attracted a lot of people who were interested in his work he did for Acorn Publisher. The many copies of this magazine were sold out very quickly. In his modest way Henk could show how he came from his idea of a design to the actual print on an 1200dpi A4 colour laser printer and actually hand out these to the people who paid attention.

At the Desk stand the PS2 Mouse Mini of Stuart Tyrrell sold very well as the alternatives for the Risc PC mice have more or less dried up and, if available, are very expensive to their PS2 counterparts.

Due to the efforts of again Henk Huinen the major RISC OS-related magazines had made

RISC OS Futures

It's rare that we report on presentations given at RISC OS exhibitions, if correct it's the first time since Acorn left the market. However this presentation was very important in our opinion because it was not the normal sales pitch but an informative insight into the RISC OS market from the point of view of one of the leading hardware manufacturer's product development programme.

The Spectrum Project was the title of the presentation and the venue was the Big Ben Expo 2001 at the Hotel Mercure in the town of Nieuwegen, Holland, and unlike most of the recent RISC OS market presentations, this one was full to bursting with every chair and vantage point taken.

The presentation started more or less on time when the exhibition organiser Aad Bezemer introduced David Atkins, MicroDigital's managing director, who despite the large crowd appeared relaxed and confident.

David started the presentation by reading MicroDigital's mission statement from a prepared brief, "MicroDigital will be the largest provider of ARM/StrongARM desktop computers worldwide by being consistently first to market with new technology solutions". Then in the absence of an overhead projector he abandoned his brief and delivered his talk without notes.

He commented that these were bold words then he proceeded to explain how MicroDigital planned to achieve their goal in a totally credible fashion, explaining that it was company policy to include alongside their own chip designs as many industry standard components and peripherals as feasible to reduce build costs.

After his opening remarks he talked briefly about the demise of Acorn and the fact that very few people outside that company knew anything about its designs and plans, this was not a criticism as he went on to explain that Acorn had very competent engineers and they were a hard act to follow.

He also explained that since that time the market has been held back by the ageing Acorn designs coupled with the fact that licensing issues were very difficult to resolve. Therefore MicroDigital were not about to invest in old technology or get involved in lengthy licensing negotiations, even though their market research indicated that the market wanted a new top of the range machine.

He described one of MicroDigital's major strengths as being the hardware and software development skills that lay in their technical director, David Prosser, who has an in-depth knowledge of RISC OS. The company also has their own automatic pcd assembly equipment and manufacturing skills in-house, a combination which is very rare in small companies.

Even so the company had to accept the fact that they had

announcements of the Expo exhibition so several UK, German, Belgian and French people were there, most probably to see the Omega.

On the part of Linux Jan Rinze Peterzon had wanted to show what work he has done and how he would like to continue his work on the Omega. The problem was it took him seven hours to get to the exhibition by public transport while it would normally should have taken two hours.

He still set up his machine at 15:00 hours and tried to make the best of it. His ultimate goal seems to be to run RISC OS applications straight on Linux. He has done quite some extensive work to get there. That is a very interesting development as for RISC OS software developers the market would be extremely bigger as their products would not just be confined to the RISC OS world but also to the Linux users. If the work will be done for the Omega the machine would excel in an even bigger way than we could have ever imagined.

Ultimately the presentation that David Atkins gave on behalf of MicroDigital was electric it sweeped the whole atmosphere from a negative one that had been there since the demise of Acorn, to a positive one where people found that there was a bright future again for the RISC OS desktop market.

Spectrum is green

The presentation was packed all seats full and people standing at the back and sides of the room, people even stood in the door openings. The show organiser Aad Bezemer introduced David and the topic of his presentation The Spectrum Development Programme.

David explained where his company came from and what his goals were and where the Omega fitted in this.

One could see by the presented hardware that the Omega was no vapourware as some people had tried very hard to make us believe. The people were now able to understand the advanced design, why it took some more time then planned and found there was no apology needed for the delay.

David told them that for MicroDigital there was no going back. Also he explained that MicroDigital did not care less if RISCOS Ltd had frozen the 32-bit version of operating system. The Omega could still be developed further with the basic RISCOS 4 available. This all due to their own system software which is running between their hardware and RISC OS. David also explained the MicroDigital RISC OS 4.03 image was completely standard with no hardware changes

That in essence made it possible to say that 32-bit applications and

never built a complete RISC OS computer and there's a great deal of difference between designing and manufacturing controller cards like the Awesome/Blitz IDE card and putting together a complete computer system. Added to this, of course, is the fact pretty well anybody can build a one-off but to be a market leader you have to be able to manufacture products that are consistently reliable in the field.

While their market research clearly identified the product that the market required there was a distinct lack of information available — you cannot just go to the library and get a book on how to design an ARM-based RISC OS computer. It was quite clear that to attempt to build a top of the range machine without such information was a recipe for disaster and they therefore decided to build a less challenging product where areas of the design were known to work.

So MicroDigital looked around at the various processors in the ARM/StrongARM market and while there are some very nice devices available, realistically there was only one choice. So it was decided that the first machine to be developed would be based on the ARM 7500FE processor, the reasons being that it had an ARM700 core which included the video and memory controllers and a floating point co-processor.

It was felt that with this combination it should be possible to build an entry level machine that had the performance of a Risc PC and could include elements to test the viability of the top-of-the-range Omega design.

With the processor, video and memory controller taken care of MicroDigital concentrated on other areas of the system such as DMA, IDEFS, MicroBus and ISA slots. David explain that the MicroBus slots were added to the system purely to develop the RISC OS graphic controller chip because this was the single most important element in the Mico design from the Spectrum Project point of view.

He also explained that the Mico was very important to MicroDigital on many levels, as it kept their competitors off the scent and proved they could build complete systems to a consistently high standard.

They also learned the level at which a new system should start up in future designs as one of the biggest problems working with ARM7500 designs was the fact that as soon as they start-up they look for and run the operating system making debugging a time-consuming exercise.

David also explained the reason why the Mico was late to market was nothing to do with MicroDigital as the pcb was first shown at the Wakefield Exhibition in May 1999 yet the company did not receive a RISC OS licence until March 2000. You can draw you own conclusions as to why there was this delay.

Having completed the Mico the next development was the Lightning graphics controller and David explained why they had developed their own graphics chip rather than use either a PCI or AGP graphics cards.

He pointed out the reason was that to buy PC cards at a sensible price meant buying old technology because the latest chipsets were far too expensive to build into a new RISC OS product, but if you buy the old technology cards by the time you have made it RISC OS aware they were no longer available.

At the time they began to development of the Lightning card large FPGA's were very expensive so it was decide that they

26-bit applications could be run on RISC OS 4 and their software would redirect the code to be run on the StrongARM or to the XScale when it becomes available while current computers would just crash. Future hardware additions need no changes to RISC OS 4 as it is.

Reading between the lines this is a problem for all other hardware vendors because they need to have their own version of RISC OS 4 to run their specific hardware or they need 32-bit RISCOS operating system with hardware independence this is a problem as Paul Middleton explained that this would not happen for desktop market.

MicroDigital's hardware independence made the people suddenly wake up that the news from RISCOS Ltd, which had been received as negative earlier that day, did not matter anymore and one could be sure the future was as bright as ever before for their most loved and cherished RISCOS.

The talk ended with a question and answer session it was good, David's approachable manner drew many questions which he answered without ever resorting to the "NDA" word.

At the end of the David's presentation the show organiser Aad Bezemer asked people how many had already ordered an Omega? A few hands full put their hands up. On the question who had now firm intentions to order an Omega? All other hands were raised.

Paul Middleton gave a presentation on behalf of RISCOS this was very negative with no direction for the desktop computers but that Pace set-top box are the way forward for RISC OS. OK for Pace and set-top box users, but we are users of desktop computers.

He suggested that there was no desktop market left. Surely that is what RISCOS Ltd was formed to do? The RISCOS stand was just outside the presentation room, so he must have heard the people's positive reaction to David Atkins. How can he think that no market exists and say this to the same people who attended the MicroDigital presentation?

We all wish to support RISC OS, but Paul tell us there is no desktop market but we must support Select what does he mean?

People said they were sorry that Paul's presentation did not talk about the way forward for desktop computers, we know that it's not easy but a way must be found.

EXPO 2001 was very important for RISCOS in Holland and other countries. The MicroDigital presentation was the highlight of the show to users, dealers and the desktop market, all the other exhibitors and people played a part in the day Acorn computers was laid to rest. Now the market can look forward to greater times.

would use two chips: an FPGA and a CPLD in a combination that gave them enough gates at an affordable price. After months of design work the Lightning chipset was born and the Mico became the first non-Acorn designed device to run RISC OS 4.

David then turned his attention to the Omega design and the choice of processor. He explained that there was basically no choice, the StrongARM SA110 was the last of the line of 26-bit compatible processors, which is the actual reason for the Omega's name. The ARM9 and ARM10 processors are 32-bit as is the new StrongARM XScale processor.

Therefore any new computer would, in the absence of a 32-bit operating system, needed to be able to run more than one processor to give the product a reasonable shelf life and they choose the SA110/XScale combination because the ARM10 was not in production and the ARM9 was clocked at 200MHz tops. While the SA110 can be clocked up to 287MHz and the XScale range of processors starts at 600MHz.

So the first task was to become an Intel-approved developer which turned out to be like sitting one's exam Finals. David explained that you are interrogated about your experience in the industry, your product and business plans for most of a day. Four weeks later they were advised that they had passed and only after that was any technical information made available.

Then came the most important part of the presentation as far as the audience was concerned when David explained that the Omega could run both 26-bit and 32-bit software without the need for a 32-bit operating system. not only that but Omega could also run 26-bit software with a 32-bit operating system.

No sooner had David finished this sentence when whispers went around the room as the listeners realised that the RISCOS Ltd announcement that they were not going ahead with a 32-bit operating system was of little importance.

In the final part of his presentation David went on to discuss the importance in the information technology market of owning the intellectual property used within one's designs. In this case MicroDigital would not only be able to utilise these designs in new products, such as handheld, laptops or workstations computers, but the same intellectual property can be licensed to other companies who wish to use the RISC OS in their own products and markets.

He explained that this twin-pronged approach would enable the desktop market to act as the shop window for the MicroDigital technology, also companies interested in using their technology could buy and use the desktop computers as development systems for their own products, and in doing so support the desktop market.

Finally David explained that any mention by him about other product types were merely examples to indicate the flexibility and possibilities available to MicroDigital from the Spectrum Project, he stressed that the listeners should not read more into his examples.

For the first time since Acorns departure one could could actually feel that the RISC OS desktop market had a future and while no one was claiming that it is going to be easy, Aad's unscientific market research showed that MicroDigital can look forward to a bright future. No one could deny that after David's presentation the exhibition came alive with a very positive buzz for the remainder of the day and everyone left the exhibition believing that the RISC OS market had at last turned the corner.



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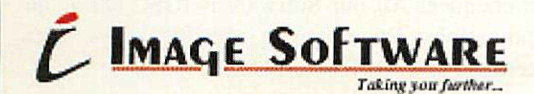


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Compatible extensions

Peter Lamb explores the capabilities of the new spreadsheet software from Clares

Being able to transfer data to and from alien (as in non-RISC OS) spreadsheets has been a problem, and also one of the reasons for arguing against the installation of RISC OS machines.

However Clares have now come up with a pair of conversion programs that will load and save spreadsheets saved as HTML.

Saved as HTML? Say what?

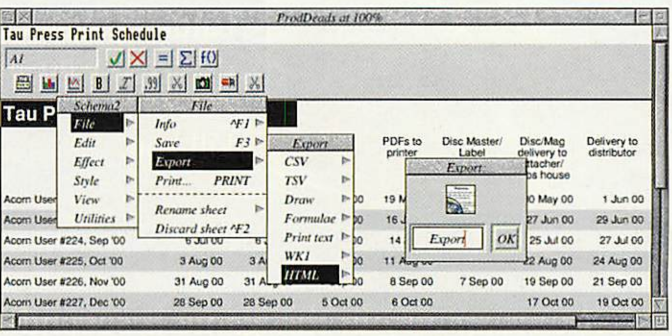
Normally, when writing conversion programs you need to know, the internal file format of the application being converted to so that you can decode what it's doing. Well Microsoft, in its eternal search for more ways to take money off people, came up with a new way of saving files in an effort to increase cross-application connectivity.

And this time it is something that can be a pay-off for everybody.

What happens is that they have written their "2000" range of productivity software to save as HTML in order to allow instant Web compatibility (part of their move to make Internet Explorer the *only* browser in the world). But more than that they save it in such a way that the HTML file contains a comprehensible (and convertible) format for the actual application contents themselves, not just the results you see on the screen.

This allows, for example, someone with a particular spreadsheet to post it on, say, an internal intranet so that others can load it into their spreadsheets and use it. But (did Microsoft miss this?) it means that the data is stored in a more easily decodable form, so it means that other platforms can write conversion programs for their spreadsheets.

Currently only Excel 2000 will do this as far as spreadsheets go but it does mean that resourceful Clares have been able to create a product which allows imports HTML spreadsheet files and can export them as well — suddenly we have Excel 2000 compatibility and if any other spreadsheet provides this kind of feature



we can import and export to them as well.

Okay so that is what the system is supposed to be, how has it been implemented?

What you get are two applications and miscellaneous (but necessary) other items. The two conversion programs are *ConvExcel* and *ConvS2htm*, which are pretty self-explanatory. To function they need to have been seen by the Filer and they work in one of two ways: Dropping an HTML file onto the Schema icon invokes the converter that checks to see whether it is the right type of file, converts it and automatically loads it.

Or you can double-click it to put it on the iconbar to do a simple conversion. Likewise with the other program to go from Schema 2 to HTML.

There are three basic versions of Schema and unfortunately each one has to be modified in a different way in order to present the HTML option on the Export menu which is a pain. There is a font conversion file in each application to ensure the fonts look okay this is a text file which can be altered by hand — looks to me like there is an opening for a standardised font conversion system.

The program functions perfectly well within its limitations — which are defined by the fact that *Schema* doesn't have all the functions that *Excel 2000* does and, in fact, vice versa. one thing that I thought might have been added (if possible) would have been including in the HTML the additional information that *Schema* uses.

As it stands you can export a file from *Schema* as HTML and bring it back in — but it's not the same. Variables for example, which I use extensively, aren't converted.

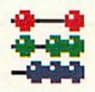
That said this is only version 1 and the system integrates with *Schema* very smoothly and it provides yet another string to our bow. END

Product details

Product:	SchemEx
Price:	£25 (inc VAT and p&p), by Schema at £80 and get SchemEx for £15
Supplier:	Clares Micro Supplies Ltd, 75a Webbs Lane, Middlewich, Cheshire CW10 9DS
Tel:	(+44/0) 1606 833999
Fax:	(+44/0) 1606 836111
E-mail:	sales@claresmicro.com
Web:	www.claresmicro.com

ClaresGlobe

This new application will allow you to transfer sheets via HTML between Schema 2 and Excel 2000 and retain all styles & formulae and now also colours



HTML —— XLS

The cost of SchemEx is £25 inc VAT & p+p or buy Schema 2 for £80 & get SchemEx for £15.

Please see our Website for more details





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!Topcat 2 (Site Licence).....£586.33
!Topcat 2 Upgrade from previous version.....£293.75

NEW SLYM (All in one 15" LCD web browser box).....£TBA

See page 61 for review of this product

Oregano Web Browser

Single user.....£57.58
Primary Site Licence.....£233.83
Secondary Site Licence.....£351.33

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E70 F.....17" 0.25mm Dot Pitch, TCO99 Flat Shadow Mask.....£210.09
E71.....17" 0.27mm Dot Pitch, On Screen Display, TCO99, 1280 x 1024@66Hz Max Resolution, 1024x768@85Hz Rec Res.....£188.94
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All printer prices (unless mentioned) include a high quality printer cable, Acorn printer driver where appropriate and any standard WindowsTM drivers that come with the printer.

Please ask for the best prices on other makes and models of printers suitable for Acorn, Apple and PC machines.

General Accessories

Mustek Parallel 600cp scanner.....£116.33
Mustek Parallel 1200cp scanner.....£151.58
(New !Twain driver supplied. Now 2.5 times faster at scanning)

A7000 PS2 Mice.....£11.75
RiscPC Mice.....£23.50
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Yamaha 8824 Internal SCSI CDRW drive.....£163.33
!CDBlaze (CDRW software).....£50.00
Cumana SCSI 2 card.....£158.63
CDRW Blank discs.....£2.50 each
CDR disc (Pack of 10).....£6.99
650Mb PD Media Cartridges.....£30.55 each

Olympus Digital Cameras

C-860L 1.3m Pixels, 3x Digital Zoom.....£194.58
C-960Z 1.3m Pixels, 3x Optical Zoom.....£291.87
C-990Z 2.1m Pixels, 3x Optical Zoom.....£389.16
C-2040Z 2.1m Pixels, 3x Optical Zoom.....£486.45
C-3040Z 3.34m Pixels, 3x Optical Zoom.....£728.97

Above cameras do not come with Acorn drivers. Check with Photodesk on latest compatible drivers.

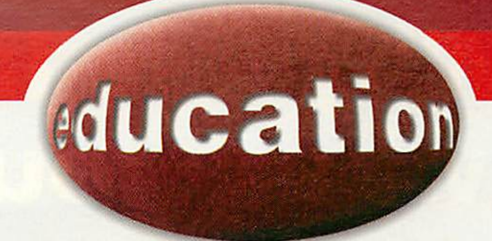
Call us now on Tel +44 (0)1279-730800/730900 Fax +44 (0)1279-730809. sales@cumana.co.uk, www.cumana.net
Cumana is a trading name of : Cannon Computing, Whitegate, Dunmow Road, Hatfield Heath, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM22 7ED. AU AUG 2001.











Is NOF naff?

Ofsted has raised its gunsights to take in the The New Opportunities Fund (NOF). The criticism comes in the Ofsted report *ICT in Schools: the impact of Government Initiatives (An Interim Report April 2000)*. One of the conclusions is that one in five primary schools, half of secondary schools and most special schools still do not comply fully with National Curriculum requirements for ICT. Data was collected by inspectors in the latter half of 2000. HMI visited 128 primary schools, 44 special schools, 401 secondary school departments and 10 local authorities.

A NOF spokesperson said that some of the comments were unfair and made too early. In fact the National Grid for Learning (NGFL) has consumed the vast part of the £657 million spent on ICT since 1998. The most immediate initiative has been the £230 million NOF/TTA training scheme. Ofsted acknowledges that some advances have been made and that teacher confidence in using ICT has been improved. However, Ofsted finds the training for those teachers who have received it has contributed to an increase in use of computers, but hasn't helped teaches make the most effective use of ICT in their lessons.

The report is particularly concerned about the discrepancies in resourcing across the country. In the primary schools visited by HMI, the pupils to computer ratios varied from 30:1 to 5:1 and in secondary schools from 20:1 to 4:1.

It also appears that schools have been very cautious about using NGFL managed service arrangements, often being put off by the apparent high costs involved. Ofsted observes that the real costs of ownership of ICT hardware and other resources, have generally been underestimated by LEAs. It believes that few headteachers and their governors manage budgets sufficiently well to sustain ICT developments in the longer term.

Becta is aware of these problems and is consulting with the ICT industry to see if viable managed services might be achieved more rapidly. So watch this space. however, Ofsted will report again next year on the NOF/TTA initiative while we wait for the TTA to publish information about the performance of the approved training providers.

Revision online

Back in the early days many of the 'good' educational software ideas came from the chalkface. The tradition continues which Paulette North from Bristol. Her online revision scheme for GCSE students has proved such a success that this has been taken up by the BBC.

Re-christened BBC Revision Online, the free service was pioneered at St George community college in the run-up to the summer exams last year. In only eight days at the start of the scheme, teachers based at the school had to deal with more than 350 calls and 100 e-mails from anxious pupils in Bristol and neighbouring authorities. Worried students can fax too.

The scheme has been extended to include a helpline for parents run by parents. Urdu, Somali, Punjabi and Bengali speakers are on hand to make complicated concepts easier to understand for those whose first language is other than English. Paulette's ideal would be that Online Revision ran until the last exam finished but lack of finance is an issue with the scheme sponsored at present by Telewest, EDS, Select Education, Protel, Bristol LEA and Community at Heart.

In brief

REM winners

So which are the summer's top sellers which an educational leaning? REM's - www.r-e-m.co.uk - listing puts Dazzle in pole position, followed by Textease 2000 V.5, Story Book Weaver Deluxe, My World 3, Clicker 4, Wordshark 2L, Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing 9, KidPix Studio Deluxe, Type To Learn and Print Artist V8.

Dazzle Plus is an updated version of Dazzle, an art program, with enough tools and features to satisfy the most creative minds. Suitable for adventurous artists, yet simple enough for the less ambitious or younger users to enjoy.

The world in your hand

In search of science resources? Then CLIC - an acronym in Welsh for colourful support for the curriculum - have some resources to help.

Founder, Gaynor Perry, is a former biology teacher and CLIC produces a nine-pack collection of support screens for My World covering all the major topics outlined in the National Curriculum for Science - 227 different activities in all for ages 5 to 11. For further information ring: 01248 671093 or e-mail: gaynor@clic.fsnet.co.uk

Espress service

Espresso Broadband (+44/0 20 8237 1200) is now basking in the sun of being the UK's number one educational resource service provider. Due in part to support fo the Government's Educational Action Zones (EAZs) and in particular with EAZs in Bristol, Redcar and Cleveland, Sunderland, King's Cross and Great Yarmouth, the total number of primary and secondary schools pupils using Espresso educational materials is over 50,000.

Pupils have access to contemporary TV programmes and news footage which are re-dubbed for greater relevance to the national curriculum and bring current affairs from around the world, such as the Middle East peace process and the Indian pilgrimage, Kumbh Mela, into the classroom.

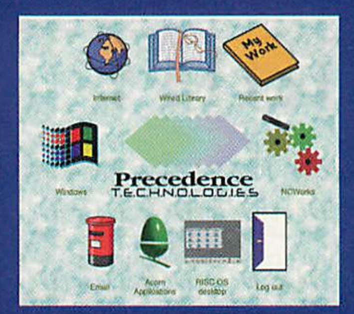
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Why use lazy old FAT clients, when you can have fast and efficient THIN clients?

Management

Control is centralised in a TotalBoot NC installation, making it easy to manage and providing a secure, tamper-proof environment. Because all software and configurations are controlled by the central NC Manager, the NC does not allow pupils to alter application settings and viruses cannot be introduced. Central management also saves time as the ICT co-ordinator will no longer have to move from machine to machine, solving individual problems. Furthermore, when the server is upgraded, all stations are instantly upgraded.



Applications

Along with curriculum content and communications applications, TotalBoot NC installations can run Windows TM and Acorn RISC OS applications, providing access to a range of industry standard and education specific software titles.

All NC installations come with NC Works - an integrated productivity suite including word processor, spreadsheet, database, graphing tool, drawing tool, painting package and Web browser. NC's provide access to all the core ICT tools in an easy-to-use environment.



...and at only £370 for a complete system

including 16MB NC with ARM 7500FE, 15" 70KHz Monitor, Mouse and Mouse Mat, Keyboard, Headphones, and even a network drop cable!

*Available for use with NC NetManager solution, TotalBoot NT solution. Network **NOT** required with TotalBoot Zip! TopCat compatible NC available upon request.*

Access

TotalBoot NC installations provide Internet access and e-mail for all stations - the communications tools needed to plug into the National Grid for Learning. A wealth of curriculum material, including Anglia Multimedia secondary or primary content covering all curriculum areas, provides a powerful intranet learning resource. In addition, TotalBoot NC installations come with Interchange which provides a curriculum index link to the World Wide Web, ensuring pupils have access to stable, educationally moderated and relevant sites.



Cost Effective

As all files and applications are managed centrally, NCs do not require hard discs, floppy drives or CD-ROM drives on each terminal. This gives dramatic savings on unit costs.

Because NCs have no moving parts, there is little that can go wrong. With PCs, most technical support requirements stem from changing user settings. Because this does not apply to NCs technical support is dramatically reduced. As a result, there are savings on repair bills and on costs associated with downtime and disruptions to teaching schedules.

Integration

TotalBoot NCs can be integrated into an existing ICT infrastructure protecting the school's investment and extending the lifespan of resources. Old PCs, including 386s and 486s, can be used as NC clients, giving a new lease of life to legacy systems.

NCs can be connected to networks of different platforms; run the same applications as exiting desktop PCs; and integrate seamlessly with established standards.



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Compacted technology

Nigel Taylor gives the low down on the new machine from Cumana

We had a dream that one day everyone would be using a RISC OS type of computer. Well, with the digital television and broadband technology revolution this is going on — most people do actually use the technology, believe it or not, and I take great pleasure in telling them that they are using a RISC processor in their little black boxes born, most probably, from some type of Acorn machine.

So, half of the dream is coming true. What about the other other half?

Well, enter the brains of Castle Technology and Cumana. I have always believed that if the RISC OS market is going to survive it has to come from the education market. I do appreciate the end-user market is also important but 4,000+ copies of RISC OS 4 is not going to change the world. Hats off to the other manufacturers who produce hardware and license RISC OS 4 but we need a product that will not just make the education market sit up and think but we need to aim it at other markets and make a point and a start.

So, early 2001 SLYM was born. First showing of the concept was at this year's Wakefield show and the official release of SLYM will probably be in the Autumn.

Why the name SLYM? Well apart from the idea of a of a RISC OS integral unit built inside a LCD screen there was never really a reason for the name. Jack Lillingston take a bow for the name.

What is SLYM?

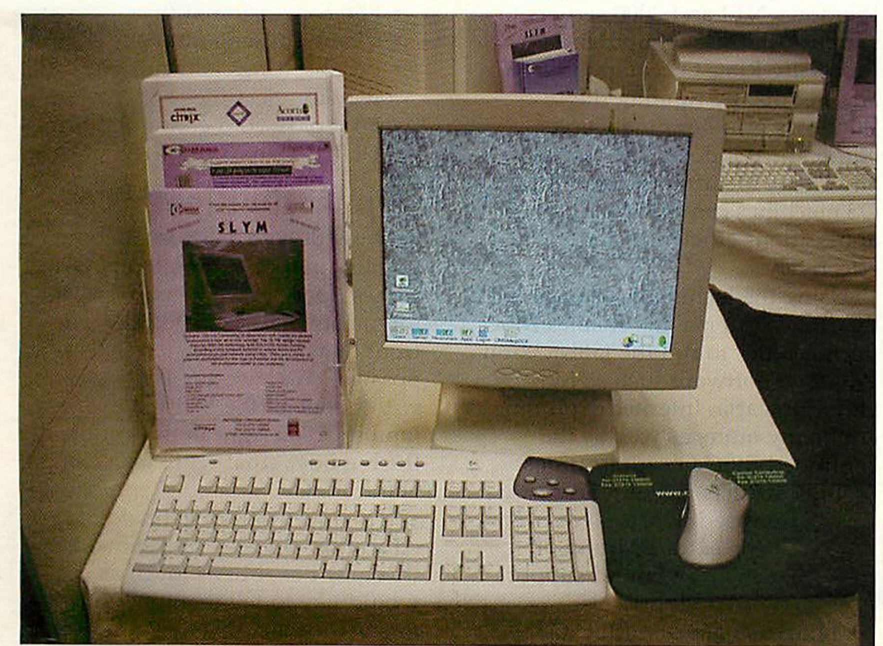
SLYM (pronounced "slim") is basically an intelligent Web terminal box, little bigger than a standard 15" LCD screen. The computer motherboard is being produced by Castle solely for Cumana. The production design is fitted very cleverly and neatly into the LCD housing along with the radio link for the keyboard and mouse. Resident in the unit is an ARM 7500FE processor which provides the sufficient processor power required. Also in the unit is 32Mb of RAM and 8Mb of Flash memory.

SLYM features a 15in TFT LCD multimedia flat panel screen which is completely flicker and radiation free. The display has a wide angle of view and can be tilted to suit the user's individual requirements.

SLYM has such a low power consumption that no forced cooling is required. This means that SLYM is free from all moving parts, eliminating noise altogether for a better, more comfortable working environment while ensuring continuous reliability.

The integrated browser ensures quick and efficient access to the Internet, with minimal external resource requirements. The SLYM can also support a wireless keyboard and mouse meaning that it only requires two connections to the outside world: a power cable and a network cable.

This minimal cable solution with its tiny footprint typically only requiring a desk of 400mm will ensure that it will be a global product especially in schools, hospitals and many other



workplaces. From a software point of view you will get RISC OS 4, the latest version of *Oregano*, ICA Citrix client for Acorn and PC for those who want to access those environments across their school network when using an NT Server, Citrix and !Topcat.

What you also get is RJ45 10/100 networking port; 2x PS2 ports; serial port; 16-bit audio; audio-out jack; parallel port; VGA port and a Reset switch. It is also worth noting that the motherboard has been designed with further expandability in mind — so if you have any particular requirements you can just give us a call.

One foot in the door

This is a system to provide cross-platform software compatibility with low client station capital and running costs with higher levels of reliability. To explain, you need a network infrastructure, typically an NT server and any number of client computers, Network Computers (NCs) or SLYMs. All the clients are controlled from a central NT server (or servers), which holds user configurations that are centrally administered. User home directories are set up and these provide private data storage with the option of additional shared work folders as well as shared resources. With the aid of central profiles and policies user settings can be preset so that users always receive the same fixed and restricted desktop environment and thus as client systems cannot be re-configured locally this minimises client station problems. As NCs and SLYMs have no floppy disc drive it is impossible to introduce viruses or indeed pirate software from these client stations.



Other standard desktop computers, both new and old specifications can be added to the system if required and these can comprise a mix of Acorns, Apple Macs and PCs.

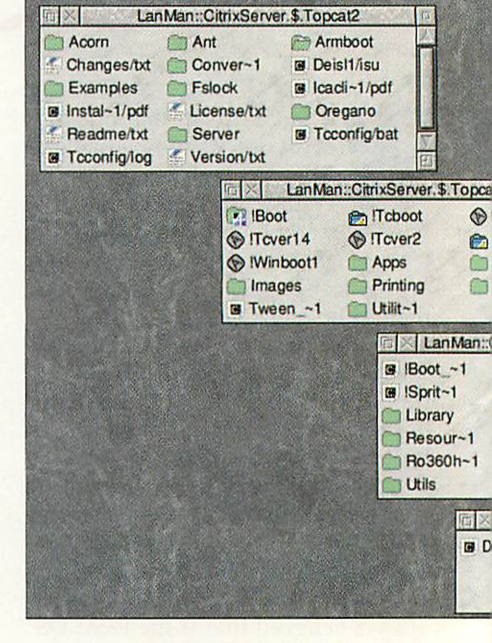
TopCat software

This is a product developed by Microlynx to enable a Microsoft Windows NT4 and 2000 servers to support RISC OS computers, especially RISC OS compatible NCs and SLYMs. By running the Windows NT4 Terminal Server edition or Windows 2000 server and Citrix Metaframe many RISC OS machines can use Windows applications efficiently and effectively.

Using the technology developed by Citrix Systems this enables RISC OS machines to run the latest 32-bit Windows software such as MS Office, Encarta, Internet Explorer and many more, as well as the continued RISC OS applications.

TopCat 2 has recently been released which gives users the extra addition of:

- Sound support in Windows
- Long filenames in RISC OS

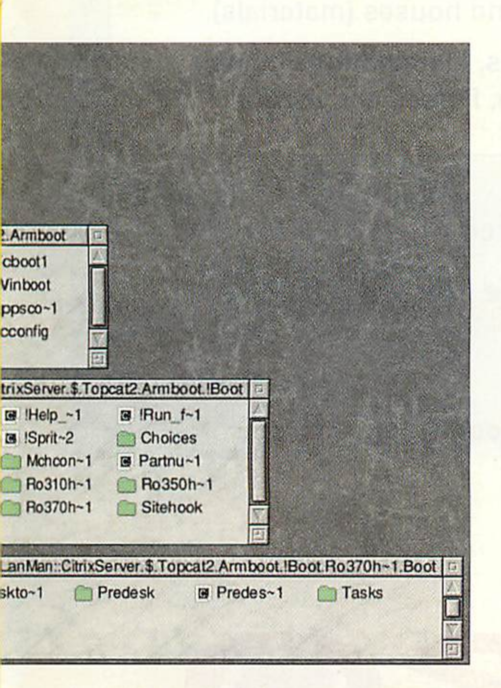


- Clients support DHCP*
- Simple load sharing of multiple Citrix servers
- Compatible with Windows 2000
- Sample scripts for printing and e-mail
- File conversion utility
- Client upgrade utilities
- Local settings allowing easy way to select files
- Boot password configurable in DHCP Manager

Opportunities

So, how do you sell such a revolutionary box? Well, that task comes down to Cumana! First and foremost we have to get this unit in front of as many decision makers as possible. We have booked a stand with Castle at the BETT show in January 2002 right in the middle of the big boys (that will make a point about RISC OS).

Then we need to get hold of education advisors and show them this new box, but as much as I would like to tell them that this is a new Acorn box this new unit will



be sold as a Web browser box with the added benefit to the users of being able to run Acorn and PC environments.

As hard as it sounds the Acorn name is no longer revered in this country by the Local Education Authorities, indeed many LEAs and schools have an active 'No Acorn, just PC' policy. It is a shame but that's the way of the world and it is down to the likes of us and you to tackle this attitude in different ways and put RISC OS back as the best operating system for us all.

Other markets that could benefit from such a box are the NHS. In a recent report it was found that the most dangerous item in a intensive care unit was the PCs they were using. Why? Well, read the report at **http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/ health/newsid_1351000/1351450.stm** and you will see how important this unit could be to a hospital environment. Businesses could benefit from such a unit. Most large organisations are on network infrastructure and most use Citrix as their server-based technology. When you start looking around at these businesses all they use is the latest modern bang up-to-date PC, but to do what?

Well, apart from sending e-mails, web browsing and using Microsoft applications across the network from their servers, not a lot else happens. What a waste of money from the employer's point of view. In my opinion you could give them a box, tell them it's a Web browser box or even a new type of PC and as long as it does those basic functions they will be happy. The RISC OS market increases to all our benefits, even if it is to run Microsoft products.

Conclusion

With the Broadband technologies out and about now and getting faster every month, schools, businesses, health services, you and I will not need desktop boxes in eighteen months time. Our whole life will be about instant access provided by your ISP who will probably hold all of your services that you need or want to subscribe to.

Okay, broadband is a little expensive just at the moment but as more and more Telecoms companies get into it prices will fall. Look at schools in this country at the moment. Most schools are being encouraged by their authority to get connected to broadband or in some areas it is being organised for them.

Schools need to teach basic skills to their children. That can come from either a RISC OS environment, a PC environment or Web environment, but it is important not to limit them, give them a choice after all, who knows what they will be using in 10-15 years time.

I think we have a clear winner for the future in our hands. Let us all try a bit harder to put the best, the most reliable, the most efficient and the faster operating system where it belongs: on four million or forty million desks not just four thousand. END

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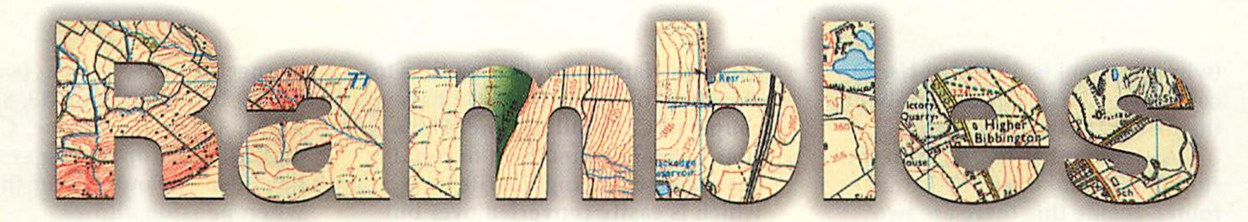
What's in a phoneme?

For those of you who are interested, this box will be available in Green and Yellow to meet those customer's needs who pronounced the box SLIME!





RISC OS



Mike Cook buys another round for RISC OS users

I We all know that Tau are the publishers of this magazine but I found out this week that the Tau-neutrino could be the answer to a thirty year old puzzle. When I lectured in Astronomy at University I told my students of the missing neutrino problem, put simply: scientists were not detecting enough of these mass-less particles from the sun.

One explanation could have been that the sun had gone out, that was nuclear reactions were no longer taking place as it takes over a thousand years for energy created in the sun's core to escape to the outer layers an on to Earth. However a neutrino should only take a few seconds to escape and another eight minutes to reach us.

Fortunately the solution has been found, it appears the thermal neutrino as been changing on route to us into a Tau-neutrino. These have been invisible to the old neutrino detectors but a new one in Canada can see some of them.

Using 1000 tons of heavy water in a 12 meter diameter 30 meter tall plastic tank, surrounded by 9600 photo-multiplier detectors some 10 neutrinos a day can be detected. Not many when about 5000 of them pass through your body every second. Anyway you can get the full story on: **www.sno.phy.queensu.ca**

On the question of feedback Jonathan Briggs has something to offer:

I "About the request for help from Phil Ball at Fleecefield School. He asks if there is any way to get an HP 610 printer to print at a reasonable speed on a RiscStation Lite. You are welcome to put him in touch with me and I'll see if I can help.

"However, I've just checked the 610 specs and it is currently the slowest printer HP sell. For £50 I wouldn't expect high speed printing. Nevertheless it could be possible to change something in the software setup to get more out of it."

I'll do that and we will see if something transpires.

Finally the letter from Jim Smyth has surfaced, thing is it just appeared on my desk just like it disappeared so I don't know what worm hole it has been hiding in. Anyway he was responding to a reader who had a problem with his desktop icons reverting to older versions.

I "In the Christmas 2000 Acorn User Simon Broadhurst wrote to you about a problem he has using alternate icons for his desktop and files and how sometimes they revert back to the default ones. I had a similar problem with mine which I've been able to sort out.

"The main culprit was when I was browsing through some of my old floppy discs (I have lots of them). Some old applications would change my nice icons back to the default ones. I too have my favourite icons in a spritefile in !Boot. Choices. Boot. Predesk. I changed my folders, applications, text files and my icon bar icons to some really smart ones which I got from various sources.

"I did try changing the !Sprites files in certain programs on my hard drive with the icon sprites of my nice ones and this to some extent worked. The only problem is that it is a bit time-consuming. Having said that though, I was still having problems with older programs off floppies changing my icons back to their default ones.

"I then came across a program called *AddSprites* and this has cured the problem fully. All I did was put the *AddSprite* module along with the *Runit* file into !Boot. Choices. Boot. Predesk and the problem was solved. When this module is loaded along with the Runit file it puts the spritefile "wimppoolme" into the spritefile which contains all your lovely icon sprites, so no matter how ancient the program is that you load, it cannot take over your preferred sprites with it's own boring ones.

"I've even been able to make the printer icon on the iconbar into a nice stand out 3D one. Also I have got rid of the old-fashioned Acorn switcher. I have a real nice looking desktop and files / apps machine now and it's all through using that module. I have cover discs dating back to the early nineties and they no longer cause problems.

"I can load anything that I want now and my preferred icons stay where they are. My computer looks really good now and nothing like the basic Risc PC desktop."

However before too long Jim had some more information:

I "I mentioned a program called *AddSprites*, although this is a program, it is not where I got the AddSprite module from. The program that I used to obtained the necessary *AddSprite* module, Runit and IconSprite



(wimppoolme) is on *Acorn User* cover disc March 1999. The label on the disc just says New Icons.

"All Simon has to do is run the floppy disc and open the Extras folder. Inside this there are two more folders, Johnson and PD. Inside the PD folder is another called Icons. Click on this to take you to the "download" file and open this up.

"What usually happens then is that the desktop background will change. The spritefile Tl kicks in and takes over. Inside the "download" folder is another folder called "icons" and this is the part that your reader needs. It holds the AddHelp, AddSprite module, Iconsprite and Runit files.

"If the smart icons supplied with this disc or if the background is not to his liking, all he needs to do is just put the AddSprite module, IconSprite and Runit files into **!Boot. Choices. Boot. Predesk.** and leave the rest. The IconSprite file must be put into his own spritefile containing his preferred icons. The files AddSprite and Runit are just put in Predesk.

"Nothing then should alter his files, directories, apps, icon bar sprites etc back to the default ones. I am not a programmer or a "techie" and had no trouble sorting this out. I should have put all this in my last letter but I only realised where I got the modules afterwards. The older module does work but there are still some icons that will not work with it.

"If your reader uses the module off the stated cover disk he will have no problems with it. I'm well pleased with it and have had no trouble at all since I loaded it in my computer, however he must load all three files that that are in the last Icons folder. Since using this program my Risc PC has undergone a facelift and looks really smart."

Then Jim had a question himself:

"I was wondering whether you knew of a program that converts Native Corel Draw files to our Draw or Sprite format. I have a couple of CDS full of Corel Draw files but cannot get them to run. I have tried changing the file type which is easily converted over but clicking on them is just a no no.

"I have tried various converter programs but still no joy. Programs like EPS4 to Draw, ArtWorks, DrawWorks Millennium, WMF to Draw, Translator, ChangeFSI and so on. Apparently the problem is that the files I'm trying to convert are Native Corel files.

Some of the files have the extension /CDR which is Corel Binary Metafile and blank icons. On another disc the files are the same /CDR only the icons are our own data icons. If I load these data icons into ArcFS and empty window comes up.

"I've tried changing them into JPEGs and then when I click on the JPEG icon it complains "JPEG Fordule: Bad or missing signature." That's because Translator has found a problem. Any advice would be very grateful."



You have found out that simply changing a file's type is insufficient, you see when you change the file type to JPEG you are just adding a three byte number to the file name to tell the computer what type of file it is. You are not actually changing the file, you are lying to the computer about what file it is, no wonder then that it complains it hasn't got the data it is expecting. I did do a bit of searching on the Web and failed to come up with any promising leads to a converter utility, does anyone out there know of one?

R. A. J. Howard from Cumbria is wanting to use some secondhand equipment but he may not have the right computer to use it in:



"I have been given a Morley User Port / Analogue Port interface which also includes an I2C connection. My system is an A3000 fitted with ARM3, 8Mb RAM, 3.2Gig hard drive, CD-ROM and RISC 3.1 operating system, it has been expanded over the years when pension allows.

"Will this interface work satisfactory on my A3000 bearing in mind its Operating system and the ROM version? I am rather interested in exploring the 'One wire bus temperature measuring system'. This will avoid having to break into the expansion port which in any case is in use.

"Any information you may have on this interface will be most welcome, oh by the way, I have been in contact with Morley, they all shook their heads, as they now deal with the opposition."



In general most hardware will work with most computers, However the A3000 was fitted with a different type of connector to most other Acorn models. If you see my article in the Christmas 1995 issue of *Acorn User* you will see how to convert an A3000-type interface for a standard Eurocard Connector used in most Acorn machines.

The problem is that you want to go the other way, as I am assuming that what you have is not an A3000 specific interface. As I assume you have already used the internal expansion socket for your hard drive then you will have to use the external expansion socket.

It's just a matter of making a converter as all the electrical signals are the same but the physical ones are not. While this is intrinsically electronically simple the mechanical construction could be tricky if you are not used to electronic construction. However, once connected to your computer the interface should function correctly.

Contacting AU

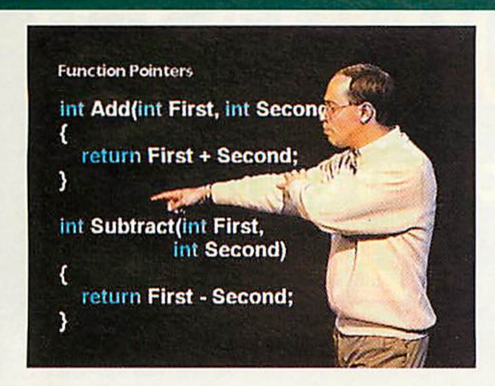
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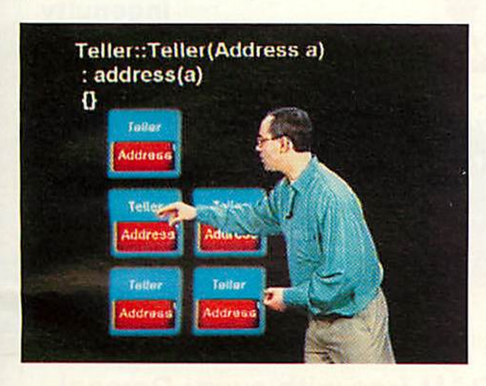


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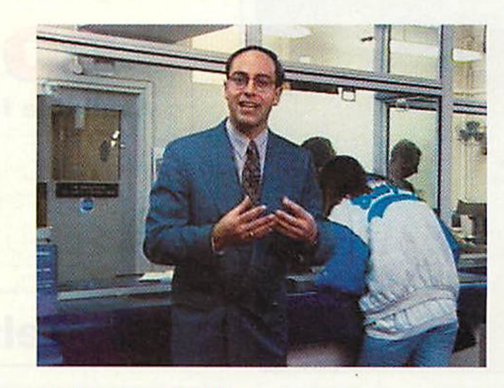
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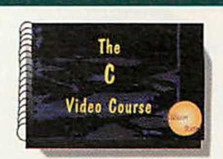
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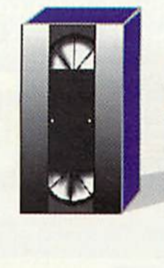
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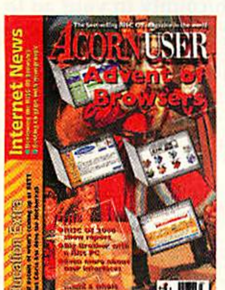
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• For sale: A304, A5000 and A7000 no reasonable offers refused, or would do a swap for Power Mac/Powerbook laptop. Mike Volsing: 01480 475036

• Wanted disk 2 from the Crystal Rainforest game. (My own disk 2 has been corrupted). Ring Jonathan on 020 7426 4779 to discuss terms of sale or swap.

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Articles of association

I thought that the lastest edition of Acorn User was the best for sometime — my only gripe is that the contents page can be incorrect (p.41 Messenger Pro review).

One article I would very much welcome, (and hopefully it would have general appeal), would be one on using my Acorn as a client onto a Linux box. I run a network at home consisting of my acorn, a PC server (running Linux) and a portable. I run a business from home and take the laptop when away from home.

My Acorn is my favourite machine but tends to be underused:

1. Because I cannot run certain programs with it (I write software in Java).

2. It does not integrate as seamlessly as I would like — ie I would use Ovation to do the documentation and user guides but I would need to take the screenshots on one box, labourious save and then transfer across. In the end I do it all on one box.

If I could run telnet,ftp and X-windows from my Acorn onto my Linux server I would be able to have my cake and eat it (and I would have a justification for spending more money on Acorn software/considering buying a new Acorn).

Using RISC OS and Linux together in this way would also seem a very good fit (Linux supports lots of things missing or less developed on RISC OS and vice-versa) — more so that RISC OS and Windows. So what about an article or a pointer to the information/companies out there?

Mark Stephens
by e-mail

Sorry about the Messenger Pro mistake — I hope the review this month makes up for it. I don't think there is any problem doing what you want to do in linking the machines — unfortunately such an article in the magazine would only be of value to a very limited number of readers.

However we have been considering making a whole section of the CD specifically for technical material, programming hints and so forth, so it might happen yet.

Kill all spammers

With regards Dave Braine's e-mail about changing e-mail addresses to get rid of spam by adding NOSPAM, for example, **fred@NOSPAMbloggsnett.com** — please don't.

Adding parts to e-mail addresses like that causes problems, as the spammers may not remove addresses like that from their lists. Thus when the e-mail is sent the e-mail server can't find the domain, and queries DNS servers, then it bounces the e-mail causing added load on the 'Net. Also the spammer often fakes the From: address, so the spam bounces to some innocent party.

Another problem with faking ones e-mail address is if people inadvertently use a real address in the From: line and a ReplyTo: address — for example From: **fredbloggs@wibble.net**, which is a valid server but an invalid user and ReplyTo: **fred@bloggsnet.com** This means that poor sysadmin at **wibble.net** has to deal with all Fred's misdirected e-mail

The best way to deal with spam is to either set up a 'spambin', a throwaway address you look at rarely, eg a hotmail account or similar and have that as the From: line, or to put **.invalid** at the end of the address, and have a real address as the ReplyTo: line — spammers rarely pick those up.

And report all spam — if you don't the spammer gets away with it **http://spamcop.net** is a good place to start.

Karl Sherratt
by e-mail

It's my world

In answer to the query in Acorn User issue 223 (which I received with a package of RiscStation equipment) about transferring MyWorld screens, a utility for simplifying the transfer of original simple screens (MW1) appears on my Web site at: **www.argonet.co.uk/users/jrw/softw/htm**

The helpfile starts thus:

This application is to simplify the conversion of simple Acorn MyWorld files to PC files. In summary, all it does is try to sensibly shorten the filename if necessary so that there is room for the PC MyWorld file extension, and then add that.

If you would like a short article describing the principles involved and the use of this simple application, I will be happy to oblige, though I think it's all in the Help file really!

John Williams
Wirral, by e-mail

Poke-a-reader

Thus goaded, I have to respond.

You are correct in thinking (*Acorn User* June 2001) that there are (almost certainly) no Japanese readers of *Acorn User*, but it does indeed have a subscriber here — only I'm actually a Pom. This tells you (a) where I come from, and (b) where I've been for most of the past 20 years — no, not

the huge "West Island", where "Pom" is a derogatory term, but the North Island, near Wellington, where it's just an innocuous term for those of us fortunate enough to hail from Merrie England.

You may rest easy — the only significance of 1st April here is that it's just that — the first day of April. Heaven knows what mayhem would break out if the Japanese ever discovered All Fools' Day — they're among the world's most determined practical jokers.

I've had a look at the **www.mimamori.net** site, and it actually turns out to be Zojirushi's information site — the solid, respectable company that invented the press-to-pour vacuum pot, or air-pot. The i-Pot is certainly ingenious and has massive credibility to my mind. Japan doesn't yet have a really well-organised system of care for the elderly (although they're working on it, hard) for the simple reason that families have traditionally done it for themselves.

However, with the advent of the geographically scattered nuclear family, keeping tabs on the old folks has become problematic for many. The i-Pot is a decidedly ingenious solution, and I wouldn't be surprised to see it having many takers. How Granny will take to having an electronic watch-dog is another matter, although the Japanese are far more likely to accept such surveillance as benign than we are.

As far as i-Mode goes, it has been a stupendous hit, to put it mildly. I wouldn't be entirely surprised to find there are more cellphones on the Internet here than computers — and if there aren't, it won't be long before there are. Not so long ago, the kids hammering away on the keypads of their cellphones on the trains were playing games on them.

Now, only some are — the rest are all doing their e-mail or just surfing the Web. I do mean e-mail, not that pansy GSM messaging system, the real thing, with standard e-mail addresses accessible globally via RISC OS/Marcel, among others. In fact, this predates i-Mode by a year or two at least. Because it will only run at 9600bps, instead of the now-standard 64kbps, my outdated cellphone only cost me ¥1, but even so, if I bothered to sign up for it, it would give me fully mobile e-mail.

Apart from the ¥200-odd a month fee, I just couldn't be bothered typing on a numeric keypad, even in English, never mind with almost 6500 Chinese characters (most of which I don't know anyway), like the locals do.

By the way, if you're interested in seeing **www.mimamori.net** for yourself, but don't have a Japanese-enabled browser, you could amuse yourself by going in via **www.dgs.monash.edu.au/~jwb/jviewer.html** which will download the Japanese as graphics. This is on Professor Jim Breen's site at Monash University in Melbourne in the aforesaid "West Island", which has all sorts of fascinating stuff about computing in Japan, as well as other Japanese topics too.

Incidentally, the "hieroglyphics" Romanise as "O bubun o kurikku suru to kakudai shashin o goran itadakemasu": Please click on the circled areas to see enlargements.

The circle, believe it or not, is actually a text character (I had to use an O, which it isn't). Japanese is coded such that each character is represented by two bytes which are its co-ordinates in a 94 x 94 matrix, which gives them 8,836 locations. Since they "only" wanted to code for 6,355 Chinese characters (a mere 10% of the whole) plus a combined couple of hundred hiragana and katakana phonetic syllables, this gave them heaps of spare locations for all sorts of odd things, such as a complete copy of the ASCII character sets in two-byte format (Greek, Russian and so on, too) and quite an array of useful graphics characters, including that circle.

These latter are a right pain when they turn up in English text which is to be transmitted abroad electronically. Here's how a row of innocent-looking asterisks in a friend's e-mail would appear on your computer (as it did on my Risc PC): $B!v!v!v!v!v!v!v!v!v!v!v!v!v!v !v!v(B

There are also [1B] control codes that help tell you which of the three Japanese coding schemes is being used — and to distinguish them also from the Chinese, Taiwanese and Korean ones.

Now all I have to do is to figure out how to port my PD Japanese word-processor from Windoze to RISC OS, so I can handle Japanese without firing up the downgrade. Displaying it is easy enough, courtesy of Mike Williams' *Kanji* (available from APDL), but typing is another matter...

Michael Poole
by e-mail

On the contrary Michael, when we said there were readers in Japan, we were including Japanese readers themselves. And thanks for the interesting information.

Quality control

There's a lot of Andy Nelson's letter in the June 2001 issue of *Acorn User* that I agree with. I, too, want USB, scanner support (for a slide scanner, not a common-or-garden A4 flat-bed), DVD, decent Internet, CD-R, MPEG, decent sound sampling, and webcam. All at a sensible price.

I'm quite happy with the second attempt at obtaining a decent printer driver for my Canon BJC3000, even though it cost me an extra £30 (one-third the price of the printer). But I'm still waiting for the money back after returning the first attempt, which proved unsatisfactory; not the sort of thing we expect from Acorn dealers.

Having said that, it only prints! There is no support for the optional scanner cartridge, photo-quality, and so on. I know Andy is right with his claim that I would be impressed with the spec of one of his home-built machines. The only thing that would put me off buying one is — no RISC OS! I've thought of buying a proper PC just so I can do things like the scanning, the sound sampling, the CD-Recording, the much faster video updating, and the camera. And let's face it, many peripherals are USB these days.

This, and all other Risc PCs, are fast approaching the end of their useful lives, and in my opinion the only hope for RISC OS in the future is machines like the Omega. I hope it delivers the goods — at a sensible price!

Chris Beesley
by e-mail

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